

“ First chance for a
real education”
– an impact study
of adult literacy

A follow-up study of Training Opportunities
and Youth Training adult literacy students in
Christchurch, New Zealand

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Note on organisation names

Three different organisation names are used in the text.

- Education and Training Support Agency (ETSA).
Established 1 July 1990, and changed its name on 1 October 1998 to:
- Skill New Zealand Pūkenga Aotearoa.
1 October 1998 – 31 December 2002.

The organisation was incorporated into a new entity with an overview of the full tertiary education sector from 1 January 2003.

- Tertiary Education Commission
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua.
1 January 2003 – to date.

Throughout, the names are used interchangeably, but wherever possible the organisation title used is the one in use at that time, based on the above chronology.

Disclaimer

The perceptions contained in this publication represent the personal perspectives of the interviewees involved in the study or the opinions of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Tertiary Education Commission Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua.

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Foreword

It has been an enlightening experience to read the findings of this research and be affirmed that our organisations have provided an environment where people have been able to address the gaps in their education and have moved on to better, brighter and more positive futures.

When the programmes were established there was very little offering as role models but competent literacy practitioners have always been aware that replicating a school environment where so many negative experiences have taken place will not provide the conditions necessary for addressing literacy needs. Our Centres have an emphasis on individual learning programmes, community, safety, trust and support. For some, their time on the literacy programmes has been the first opportunity for any consistency in their learning. The gains experienced are not purely educational but are evident in self-esteem, confidence, personal growth and trust.

We have been humbled by the courage of our students in being so willing to share their learning journey as part of this research. Through their insights and openness we see literacy, as our organisations have promoted it, as part of a wider set of strengths and abilities that have come to be known as foundation skills.

It is very affirming that our programmes' impact on Māori learners is equally positive. One revealing statistic was that 78% of all respondents attended the programmes for personal reasons. The fact that they wanted skills to further their education, rather than for family and employment reasons emphasises the void that they have felt through lack of literacy.

The research highlights the expertise and experience of those working in the field of adult literacy. That the very diverse range of skills and the passion they bring to their work is so valued by students is very empowering and affirms that there is a place for dedicated literacy programmes as part of the provision of foundation skills. The opportunity for tutors to gain qualifications will be welcomed by those in the field and will raise the status of the job. However, as this research highlights to be a successful adult literacy tutor, one must be highly skilled and multi-tasked, qualities that are acquired by both dedication at the 'coal face' over a long period of time, and the willingness to devote time and energy to study in a very broad set of disciplines. It is important that we value and hold on to this experience. To do so we must make support available through appropriate professional development and recognisable qualifications.

The key findings and conclusions of the survey will be useful for planners and policy makers in the field of adult literacy. They clearly express what tools are necessary for adult literacy to be a 'recognised form of educational provision'.

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CHAPTER 1

Overview

Introduction

Adult literacy has become a prominent component of educational policy in New Zealand over recent years, particularly following the publication of the first national adult literacy survey in 1996 (OECD, 1997; Walker, Udy and Pole, 1997). Concern about the level of literacy skills across the New Zealand adult population has also been expressed in key national documents such as the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) reports (TEAC, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2000) and the Tertiary Education Strategy (Office of the Associate Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, 2002). In addition, a specific adult literacy strategy (Office of the Minister of Education, 2001) has been developed for the first time in New Zealand.

This study has sought to map the impacts that two adult literacy programmes have had on their participants. In recognition of the fact that change achieved by education does not always happen immediately, the study has focussed on the experiences of students who have been out of the programme for some time. Its value lies in its demonstration of the diversity of impacts over the longer term.

Background

The history of adult literacy programmes in New Zealand can be traced back to the early nineteenth century.¹ With the expansion of primary and secondary schooling in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was widely assumed in many 'first world' countries including New Zealand that virtually all adults were able to read and write. Adult literacy was seen as an issue, which was largely restricted to poorer countries of the world with limited opportunities for formal schooling. Like typhoid and smallpox, modernity was seen to have solved illiteracy, certainly in countries like New Zealand.

1 Many early missionary efforts among Māori iwi emphasised the importance of reading, and reading was adopted very enthusiastically by many Māori throughout the country. The teaching of reading and writing to many English settlers who had received little formal schooling was also an important feature of life in several of the early Pākehā settlements.

Until quite recently, this assumption of 100% adult literacy was sustained officially. In the early 1990s the New Zealand government was still officially informing UNESCO and the OECD that there was no illiteracy in this country (Watson, 1999). Certainly if someone was shown to have literacy difficulties, it was couched in terms of their personal inadequacy, if not a lack of intelligence. As Watson (p. 72) says,

Illiteracy was perceived as a personal handicap, and people who had such a handicap were to be pitied, and perhaps blamed, for their lack of competence and self-regulation.

From the early 1970s, however, it became increasingly apparent to those with an interest in adult literacy in many countries that the extension of compulsory schooling into the teenage years had not succeeded in ensuring high levels of literacy for all. Adult literacy programmes in New Zealand grew from small beginnings in the 1970s with volunteers working with learners on a one-to-one basis. With the support of the National Council of Adult Education, adult literacy programmes grew in the late-1970s and early-1980s into a national movement and in 1982 a national federation of literacy groups, the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance Federation (ARLA, later Literacy Aotearoa) was formed (Hill, 1990).

Much of this early work was organised on a local basis by churches, community organisations and in people's homes, which continues to this day. In addition, in 1990 the ARLA Federation created a national workplace literacy project called Workbase, which became an independent, not-for-profit organisation in 1996 with the aim of promoting workplace literacy.

The 1970s were years of relatively full employment. By way of contrast, the 1980s and early 1990s saw considerable economic, social and political upheaval. This period was also characterised by low levels of capital accumulation and high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Successive governments introduced a wide range of policies influenced by neo-liberal ideologies which (a) exposed New Zealand institutions, both private and public, more fully to the forces of multinational capitalism, (b) reduced the level of provision of services by the state, and (c) introduced 'user pays' policies for many of those services which continued to be provided or supported by the state.

High levels of unemployment and underemployment associated with these policy changes had very widespread effects. Many young people were left struggling to enter the labour market and

many older people struggled to re-enter it following redundancies and lay-offs, especially as a result of large-scale state sector re-structuring. In response to these pressures, and especially the rising levels of long-term unemployment, several training and re-training programmes were set up by the state. In 1987 the Lange Labour Government launched Access. One of the new elements introduced as part of this programme for the unemployed was that the state would purchase education and training not only from its own institutions (especially polytechnics), but also from employers and a growing number of private providers. The assumption underlying this initiative was that it would generate greater educational and training flexibility, as well as greater responsiveness to the demands of the changing labour market.

Access was administered initially by the Labour Department, which was responsible to Regional Employment and Access Councils (REACs), set up in each region. The programme was primarily intended for those who were disadvantaged in the labour market. Entry to the programme was, however, open to anyone who was unemployed, with the level of state funding for each trainee being related to the level of disadvantage they faced. Maccess (Māori Access) ran alongside the general programmes and was administered separately by Māori authorities (Maccess Authorities). It focused specifically on Māori, and was delivered mainly by Māori providers.

In addition, an Access programme was established to operate in the prisons (Paccess). From their early days many Access programmes included an adult literacy component, informed by a small-scale incidence study of Access trainees (Irwin, 1988). In 1990 as part of the overall reform of post-compulsory education and training, the administration of Access, along with other industry and work-related forms of education and training, was transferred to a newly established agency, the Education and Training Support Agency (ETSA).

In 1990, a National Government was elected and in 1992, it enacted new Industry Training legislation, much of which had been foreshadowed in earlier reform packages. However the new government looked to give further emphasis to ways of targeting government-funded programmes and increasing the efficiency of a number of programmes in achieving employment and further training outcomes. Accordingly, at the start of 1993, Access was abolished and the Training Opportunities programme (TO) was set up in its place. In addition, later that year Maccess was also subsumed into TO. Although TO retained many of the features of Access, it was targeted more specifically at school leavers and long-term job seekers with limited qualifications. It aimed to assist

them to obtain employment or to move into further education and training. Providers were measured on the basis of their records in 'delivering outcomes' consistent with these objectives. Literacy however remained a key concern within ETSA, and it was ETSA that funded both the programmes in this study.

Until 1998, TO was funded through Vote Education and was administered by ETSA. On 1 July 1998, the programme was divided in two: Youth Training and Training Opportunities. At that time, \$24 million was allocated from Training Opportunities to the Department of Work and Income (DWI) — now the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) — for work-related training and other assistance initiatives.

From that time until the end of 2002, Skill New Zealand Pūkenga Aotearoa continued to administer both Youth Training and Training Opportunities programmes, with Training Opportunities being funded through Vote Work and Income, and administered under contract to the MSD, while Youth Training has been funded through Vote Education. Eligibility for the programmes was divided by age: Youth Training catered to 16 and 17 year-olds (and 15 year-olds with school exemptions) and Training Opportunities was for those aged 18 and over.

Both of these programmes, which provide state-funded full-time education/training, have been driven primarily by the demands of the labour market. Youth Training has been seen as providing a bridge for school leavers with 'low or no qualifications', and Training Opportunities has continued to be targeted at 'those most disadvantaged in the labour market', particularly long-term unemployed people. Increasing efforts have been made to ensure that participants in the programmes are able to gain credits towards nationally recognised qualifications registered on the Qualifications Framework.

Skill New Zealand was a significant agency in the development of adult literacy provision, especially through its Youth Training and Training Opportunities programmes in recognition of the importance of literacy both in the workplace generally and in helping unemployed people into employment. In Canterbury, the Tertiary Education Commission has provided funding for two distinctive adult literacy programmes in Christchurch at Hagley Community College and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) for some years now. By way of contrast with many other adult literacy programmes which provide tuition for only a few hours a week, these programmes are distinctive in that most of their learners attend the programmes on a full-time basis,

enabling them to have sustained literacy tuition over an extended period of time.

The Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) programme

The programme offered by the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) had its origins as an Access programme in the late-1980s and was originally funded by the Labour Department on the advice of the Canterbury REAC. The CPIT is the largest polytechnic in the South Island and offers a wide range of degree, vocational, technical and community education courses, both full-time and part-time and of varying lengths. These courses include business, community studies, computing, engineering, food and fashion, travel and tourism, hospitality, an International School of English Language, midwifery, nursing and other health-related courses, professional hairdressing and te mātauranga Māori.

The Training Opportunities literacy programme is fully funded by the Tertiary Education Commission. The aim of the programme is:

To make further training a conceivable and attainable goal by raising trainees' literacy, language and numeracy skills and increasing their confidence, self-awareness and aspirations. The course aims to change the locus of control from an external source to the trainee in order that learning will also take place outside of the course environment (Johnson, 2000, p. 52).

The CPIT programme is taught by one full-time and two part-time tutors, and aims to provide basic literacy, numeracy and computer instruction along with referrals to additional education and training. It is based in two adjoining teaching rooms, located on the polytechnic campus in downtown Christchurch. The rooms are organised in an informal fashion with a number of discussion, study and teaching areas and five computers. Students also have full access to the Learning Resource Centre, Recreation Centre and library at CPIT.

A maximum of twenty students are accepted annually, with fourteen being accepted for each 18-week semester; immediate replacements are usually made from a waiting list if any student ceases to attend. Over the years there have however been some fluctuations in numbers. Learners are selected after interviews with the programme co-coordinator and priority is given to pre-readers and beginning readers, as well as ensuring a mix of women and men, and a variety of races and ages.

The programme is considered a 'first step' for adults who have not previously had success in the traditional education system and consists of 30 hours a week devoted to independent and small group learning and one-to-one tutoring. Most work is focused on improving reading, writing, spelling, maths, CV writing and 'life skills' such as managing time and goal setting. Teaching strategies used include language experience, writing autobiographies, and independent projects based on current issues and student interests. As students show interest in other polytechnic courses, enrolment is facilitated.

The Hagley Community College programme

Hagley Community College offers a wide range of traditional and non-traditional secondary school courses, and is no newcomer to educational innovation and adult and community education. It has a long history of community involvement and was the first secondary school to admit adults to its regular daytime classes. The College has continued to encourage the widest possible mix of people of all ages and from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in its day and evening classes. Approximately fifty percent of its total student roll are adults (19 years or older). Moreover, it has one of the largest and most diverse community education programmes offered by secondary schools in the country as a whole (Latham, 1995).

The programme offered by Hagley Community College was established in 1994 following an approach by the Education and Training Support Agency to develop a proposal for a literacy and numeracy training facility for unemployed adults.

The College subsequently set up the Hagley Learning Centre in one of the cottages on the college campus near to Hagley Park and the city centre. The Learning Centre at this time consisted of a large meeting/teaching area furnished informally, a second seminar room and its own administrative and office spaces. The buildings have recently been adapted, at the request of the students, and each group now has a fully functional learning space.

In a circular distributed in November 2002, the Hagley Learning Centre stated its aim:

... to provide a safe, supportive, non-competitive learning environment where persons who have left mainstream education without sufficient skills, are able to address the gaps in their learning and move on to further education, training or employment.

The centre offers basic literacy, numeracy and computer instruction. Students have individual learning programmes and work in groups of approximately ten per tutor. Students attend the programme for 30 hours per week, including some skills and recreation programmes. About 40 students are accepted at any given time, and there is often up to 80 on the waiting list, although these numbers vary from year to year. Learners are selected after interviews with the programme co-ordinator, partly on the basis of likelihood of success on the programme and partly with a view to ensuring a diversity of backgrounds and skill levels among the students as a whole.

The curriculum is based on a 'holistic style' of learning — focusing on the whole person (Johnson, 2000, p. 54). Each student is assigned to one tutor. Activities are planned around students' interests, and they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning with help, advice and support being readily available.

About half of the students also take classes at Hagley Community College and through The Correspondence School. These classes include both 'mainstream education', such as English and maths, and 'electives' such as cooking, computers and woodworking. Enrichment activities outside Hagley are also available to students, including extensive recreation opportunities such as overnight camping trips.

The literacy programme at the centre is fully funded by the Tertiary Education Commission. The board of trustees of Hagley Community College has overall responsibility for its operations, although the board has delegated responsibility for the learning centre to the college principal and the centre's management committee. The centre currently employs four tutors and is administered by a co-ordinator who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre.

CHAPTER 2

Research methodology

This chapter provides a discussion of the aims and purposes of the study described in this report as well as discussing details of the research methodology used.

The research aims

This research project was intended to contribute in a number of ways to an understanding of the impact of adult literacy programmes in general and the adult literacy work of Skill New Zealand in particular.

In the first place, very little is known about the impact of tuition on adult literacy learners generally, but especially over the medium- to long-term. A few studies in other countries are beginning to provide some useful information, but there are no comparable studies available in New Zealand. Moreover most New Zealand studies to date have drawn on small samples (see Benseman, 2003a for a review of New Zealand research). This study is intended to begin the process of looking at the medium- to long-term impact of some adult literacy programmes in New Zealand, and to do so by drawing on a reasonably large sample of learners.

Secondly, it is becoming increasingly clear that both the intensity and duration of adult literacy tuition are pivotal in achieving significant progress for learners (Basic Skills Agency, 2000; Brooks, Harman, Hutchison, Kendall, & Wilkin, 1996; Padak, Sapin, & Baycich, 2002; Powell, 1996; St. Pierre & Layzer, 1996). And yet the kind of intensive and relatively long-term literacy tuition that was available to the participants in the programmes covered in this study is still relatively rare, even internationally. One purpose of this study therefore has been to investigate participants' perceptions of the impact of the programmes in the light of their length and intensity.

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

- What was the impact of the tuition on the trainees' literacy skills since they left the programme?
- What use do the learners now make of their literacy skills?
- What additional literacy tuition or help have the trainees undertaken since leaving the programmes?

- What impact has occurred on broader aspects of the trainees' lives, including work, family and their broader community involvement?
- What evidence is there of the trainees pursuing further educational pathways since leaving the programme?
- How do the trainees evaluate their experience in the literacy programmes from their present perspective?

Interview sample

The data used in this study came from former Training Opportunities and Youth Training trainees who had participated in adult literacy programmes at either Hagley Community College or Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) between 1996 and 1999.

We originally hoped to make contact with up to 200 participants. The initial plan was to gather data from as many as possible of those who had participated in either programme during 1996 (106 participants), 1997 (89 participants), or 1998 (101 participants) — a total of 296 participants. Interviews were to be undertaken during the latter part of 2002. In this way it was hoped that the study would provide a picture of what had happened to former trainees over the four- to six-year period following their participation in the programme, and in particular, identify what effects the programmes had on their lives. From the outset, however, it was recognised that it might be difficult to trace a sufficient number of people to make the study viable following a four- to six-year break, and that data might also have to be gathered from trainees who had attended the programmes in 1999 (96 participants).

In order to begin the process of building up a database of potential interviewees, Skill New Zealand employed a researcher over the summer of 2001–2002 to find out how many of the trainees who had attended Training Opportunities or Youth Training literacy programmes provided by CPIT and Hagley Community College between 1996 and 2000 could be traced. The researcher drew on Skill New Zealand's own database as well as the Christchurch Telephone Directory, local Electoral Rolls and Te Tai Tonga Electoral Roll. Tutors at CPIT and Hagley Community College also supplied additional information. The outcome of this feasibility exercise was the development of a database consisting of the names and addresses, and (where they were available) the telephone numbers and current occupations of all former trainees who could be traced. A total of 227 trainees (75% of the total) from programmes held between 1996 and 1998 were identified in

this way. In addition, 49 (84%) new trainees from 1999 were identified.

Initially the 1996–1998 database was used for this study. However, the decision was eventually made to include the 1999 database as well. Throughout the period of data-gathering, help in tracing people was provided by key people in the Christchurch regional office of Skill New Zealand and at Hagley Community College and the CPIT. In spite of extensive efforts, there were considerable difficulties in contacting many of the participants. Many had no telephone or contact telephone number, while others had out-of-service phone numbers, which meant that a large proportion of those identified in the original list could not be contacted in this way. Accordingly, reply-paid letters were then sent to 126 people; the rate of response to this strategy however was predictably low.

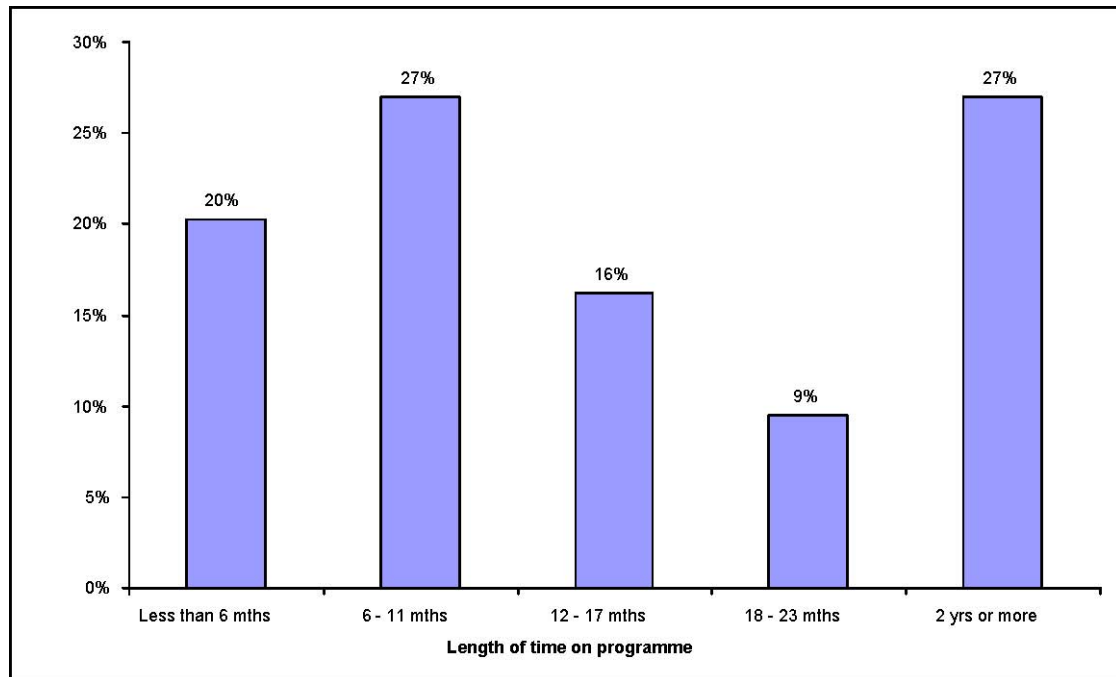
In the end, 176 (64%) of the total of 276 people on the initial list provided by Skill New Zealand could not be contacted. Reasons for non-contact included death, moving overseas or elsewhere in the country, changes of addresses or telephone numbers, name changes or imprisonment. Only 100 could be contacted, and of these, 83 people agreed to be interviewed. This constituted only 30% of those on the original list. On the other hand, it comprised 83% of those who had been contacted.

Of those contacted, only 17 were unwilling to be interviewed at all, 14 responded to a shortened form of interview, and 69 participated in a full interview. (See Appendix A for full details)

Fifty-eight (70%) of the interviewees attended the Hagley Community College programme, and 25 (30%) attended the CPIT programme. This compares with 178 (64%) of the initial contacts who attended Hagley Community College and 98 (36%) who attended at CPIT.

The length of time interviewees remained on the literacy course that they attended varied widely, as indicated in the Figure 1. Twenty percent attended for less than 6 months; by way of contrast 27% attended for two years or more.

Figure 1 - Length of participation on programmes (N=74)



Of the interviewees, 39 (47%) were women and 44 (53%) were men². This compares with an estimated 113 women (41%) on the initial contact list, and 163 men (59%), which means a slight under-representation of men in the final sample of interviewees. The ages of interviewees are given below together with comparisons with the ages of those on the initial contact list. The distribution of ages in the interview sample and in the initial list is similar, although the proportion of younger (under 25 years) people in the interviewee sample is somewhat smaller than in the initial list and the proportion of older people (40 years and over) is somewhat larger.

2 Due to statistical rounding percentages may not always add to 100.

Table 1 - Ages of Interviewees and of those on initial contact list of participants

Age group	Initial contact list	Interviewees
<25	47 (17%)	10 (12%)
25-29	53 (19%)	15 (18%)
30-39	95 (34%)	26 (31%)
40-49	61 (22%)	23 (28%)
50 & over	20 (7%)	9 (11%)

With regard to cultural background, 65 (78%) of the 83 interviewees identified themselves as NZ European or Pākehā, 13 (16%) identified themselves as Māori, and there were 5 (6%) who came from other cultural backgrounds including two from Pacific backgrounds. These proportions are comparable with figures of 74% NZ European or Pākehā, 18% Māori, 4% Pacific, and 4% Other in the initial list.

A total of 67 interviewees responded to a question concerning their first language. Sixty-three or 94% of these people stated that their first language was English; one said it was Māori, two Samoan, and one said it was Japanese. Forty-eight percent of the 66 interviewees who responded to the relevant question, stated they had children.

Interview schedules

The interview schedules were developed over a two-month period during August and September 2002. The writers developed initial drafts, which were then revised in the light of detailed comment and feedback from the two programme co-ordinators. These co-ordinators were asked specifically to look at the wording of the questions and to trial the interview schedules with current students to identify any difficulties or ambiguities. Trial interviews were also undertaken by the interviewers and in the light of this experience, further revisions were made.

The final interview schedules included a mix of questions designed to gather data that could be quantified, and other forms of qualitative data that would shed light on questions and issues that could not be quantified. The questions covered

- (a) information about the participants and their life experiences

- (b) interviewees' perceptions of themselves, their experiences and their abilities (both in the past before attending the courses and today) in a form which could be quantified (by means of rating scales and other structured response categories)
- (c) open-ended questions designed to encourage interviewees to talk about themselves and others and their experiences as these related to their literacy practices.

For some questions interviewers used identical wording for each interview, some questions allowed for probing by the interviewers, and for other questions the interviewers used their own words to encourage participants to respond in their own words. In an effort to ensure ongoing communication both between interviewers and with the principal researchers, regular meetings were held to discuss problems. This was done to ensure the highest possible degree of consistency of approach between the interviewers (see Appendix B for the interview schedules).

All procedures used in the study were subject to ethical approval by The University of Auckland's Human Subjects Committee.

Interviewing strategy

Our original intention had been to undertake short telephone interviews with as large a sample as could be contacted (possibly as many as 150 to 200 people). From the total sample, we then planned to select a sub-sample of about 20 people to interview in some depth to obtain additional data. These respondents were to be chosen on the basis of information gathered in the initial questionnaire.

Three factors caused us to change our plans. Firstly, as we have already indicated, the proportion of former trainees who could be contacted proved to be very much smaller than initially appeared likely on the basis of the data supplied by Skill New Zealand. Secondly, it took very much longer than anticipated to make many of the contacts. Thirdly, a significant number of those who were contacted were willing to talk freely and extensively on the telephone, enabling us to gather some rich qualitative data by means of the telephone interviews.

Because of these factors, several changes were made to the original plan. In the first place, in order to obtain as many interviews as possible, further searches of Telecom's White Pages were made. In addition, we decided to extend the database to include the 1999 trainees. Secondly, it was decided to develop

two forms of telephone interview (see below). Thirdly, in the light of this, it was decided that further face-to-face interviewing was unnecessary.

So while our total number of interviews was smaller than originally intended, we more than compensated for this by gathering a greater depth of data from those people we were able to interview. Furthermore, the total number of interviews conducted (83), also enables us to make generalisations about this group of learners with a reasonable degree of confidence.

The interviews took place over two months in October and November 2002. The three experienced interviewers who conducted the interviews had all studied in the field of adult education and had previous interviewing experience. Before the interviewing commenced, several meetings were held with the interviewers to ensure that they were familiar with the study, and in particular, with the interview schedule. The interviewers were employed part-time during the period and worked either from their homes or from an office at the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Canterbury. The interviews took place at various times in the evenings and during the day, on both weekdays and weekends; they varied in length from three to sixty minutes. Each person contacted was informed briefly about the nature and purpose of the project and invited to participate. They were advised that their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected and they were informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw any information before the beginning of December.³

Three options for each interview were available. Firstly, interviewees were asked if they were available to participate in a twenty- to thirty-minute telephone interview at that time. Secondly, if they were not available then, interviewers asked them if they could make an appointment for a telephone interview at another more convenient time. Thirdly, if they were reluctant to participate in an extended interview, they were asked if they would be willing to answer only a few questions which would take no longer than three or four minutes. In spite of the decision to abandon face-to-face interviews in general, only one or two of the interviewees stated a preference for this option, and interviewers then arranged to meet them at the University or at another place preferred by the interviewees.

3 Throughout this report all names have been changed and any identifying information has either been changed or removed.

With the interviewees' permission, most interviews were recorded and later transcribed. In addition, the interviewers made detailed notes as soon as possible after each interview. These notes were kept, along with the transcriptions for later analysis. In the few cases where permission to record the interview was not given, only the notes which were made during and immediately following the interview were kept. Following each interview, interviewees were also sent a letter informing them once again of the nature of the project, their right to withdraw⁴, thanking them for their contribution and contact phone numbers (all in keeping with ethical requirements of The University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee — see Appendix C for a copy of the letter.)

4 None did.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

This literature review is intended to identify some of the key issues and findings raised by previous studies that have investigated the impact, benefits and possible limitations of adult literacy tuition. The review is not exhaustive; rather, the intention is to review a selection of research that we have found to be either closely related to the present study or insightful for our purposes. The emphasis is primarily on those studies concerned with investigating the impact and benefits of adult literacy tuition - namely in the areas of employment, literacy skills, and impact on self, family and further learning. However these benefits and effects cannot be looked at without also taking into account the wider contexts of literacy learning. The review therefore also draws on some studies that investigate the ways in which these wider social factors themselves impact on literacy programmes and literacy learning. This review draws primarily on overseas studies, but also a number of New Zealand studies where available.

Literacy issues and the unemployed

The incidence of literacy difficulties among unemployed people in New Zealand (and internationally) is now well established from Irwin's study of ACCESS students (1988) through to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (OECD, 1997). The IALS data from a national sample of 4,223 adults showed the following distributions of unemployed people across the five skill levels.

<i>Level 1 (Low)*</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4/5</i>
48%	28%	17%	7%

* For prose literacy

Level One "indicates persons with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give to a child from information printed on the package" and Level Two respondents "can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out and in which the tasks involved are not too complex" (OECD, 1997, p. xi).

Furthermore, a British study, *Use it or lose it* (Bynner & Parsons, 2000), found that unless unemployed people's literacy skills had

reached a reasonable threshold, they were likely to deteriorate while they were out of work and that literacy programmes were essential to prevent this skill loss.

Impact of literacy tuition

North American research — quantitative studies

Much of the research in this area is quantitative and empirical. Some of the largest studies, and those which have used some of the most sophisticated statistical models, have been undertaken in the United States of America (US). We review this literature first, and then move to review some of the growing body of ethnographic and qualitative research.

Not all literacy programmes make an impact on the participants' literacy skills, and where they do, the impact can be quite small. For example, in a study of 38 literacy students in Minnesota over a 15-month period, Copeland, Ploetz & Winterbauer (1985) found that while most students made progress in their reading and computation skills, a few actually regressed (as measured by two forms of test); the students made greater progress in computation skills than in reading.

The impacts resulting from literacy programmes also include non-literacy changes. When followed up after completing the programme, this study found that there was a doubling of the percentage of students in full-time employment, an increase in the number of hours the students worked and a decrease in dependence on Medical Assistance and food stamps. In their personal lives there was an increase in the numbers who became U.S. citizens, in the hours worked as volunteers and improvements in self-esteem.

In Iowa a sample of 1,597 (a 31% adjusted response rate) General Equivalency Diploma (GED)⁵ graduates were surveyed to measure the long-term impact of earning the diploma (Beder, 2002). In order to measure the short, medium and longer term effects of the GED, the sample was drawn from interval cohorts of graduates two, five and ten years after their graduation. The study reported a wide range of positive changes that occurred for the graduates since leaving the programme, including:

5 The GED is seen as a major (usually long-term) basic qualification in most US adult literacy programmes; all the GED graduates in this study had previously attended Adult Basic Education classes.

- higher rates of employment than the Iowa average (from 54% to 71% over the 10 years); the increase was greatest for the younger graduates under 40 years and for women
- the number of hours worked per week increased from 19.8 to 27.1
- increases in job skill levels (2.8 to 3.5 on a 5 point scale) and job satisfaction (2.0 to 2.4 on a 5 point scale)
- personal incomes increased by 43%
- dependence on welfare decreased dramatically by 70%
- employment benefits (e.g. health insurance) increased substantially
- personal savings and home ownership (54% to 70%) increased
- 12% had gone on to higher education
- the GED graduates' children had graduated from high school at the average State rate
- a higher percentage of the GED graduates' children had enrolled in higher education than the graduates
- most attributed obtaining employment and economic benefits to passing the GED.

Using a change score scale to measure the magnitude of the changes⁶, the study concluded:

- on average, all gains in employment and economic benefits were positive; there were no statistically significant declines in benefits over time
- gains in employment, welfare termination and home ownership were stable over time
- gains in hours worked were greatest between the two- and five-year time cohorts

6 A statistical analysis showed that these benefits were not due solely to maturation (i.e. would have occurred anyway as the respondents aged). The lack of a control group detracts somewhat from these comparisons.

- job skill levels, job satisfaction, job quality gains, personal income, enrolment in health insurance, life insurance and pension programmes, personal savings accounts all increased steadily and significantly over time
- economic benefits generally increased steadily and significantly over time.

Finally, the study identified a number of non-economic 'quality of life' benefits:

- being better able to assist their children with school work
- feeling that they were better parents generally
- increased contributions to their community or church
- increased self-esteem
- improvement in the general quality of their lives.

Another substantial study of adult literacy students in Tennessee used a time series design (enabling annual 'snapshots' of three cohorts of subjects), a longitudinal design over a period of five years (enabling a 'motion picture' of the same subjects over this period) and a series of case studies of individuals, communities and programmes (Merrifield, Smith, Rea, & Crosse, 1994; Merrifield, Smith, Rea, & Shriver, 1993). The study's initial cohort involved only 70 individuals, but this number increased with the addition of each successive cohort. The sample also had an over-representation of African Americans, but like the Iowa study, did not have a control group to enable ready comparisons or generalisations. In brief, this study found:

- Employment: half of those looking for work achieved this goal within the first year; however most did so by dropping out of the programme and gaining low-skill jobs, thereby failing to gain any benefit from their participation.
- Self-esteem⁷: boosts in self-esteem were much more common for women than men and for those who managed to find a new job. Those who dropped out earlier had higher self-esteem scores when they entered the programme than when they were followed up.

7 The study reports that the subjects at the start "do **not** fit the stereotype about people with low literacy skills: that they have low self-esteem and that they are poor parents" (Merrifield et al., 1993, p. 5).

- Involvement with children: over half of the parents in the study felt that their relationships with their children had improved and that the children were achieving better in school.⁸
- Everyday literacy: the literacy gains reported were modest (including less need to rely on memorising things), as well as an increase in the use of libraries.

A later study using the Tennessee participants (Bingman & Ebert, 2000) endeavoured to gain greater depth of understanding of the benefits to learners through in-depth interviews with 10 learners (a sample they nonetheless claimed “to be as representative demographically of the Tennessee ABE population as possible” p. iv). In particular, the authors set out to explore the benefits of literacy tuition beyond simple skill and educational gains. Their findings about these benefits are similar to those reported in the Iowa study quoted above.

In a Canadian study (Malicky & Norman, 1996) of 94 literacy students (most of whom had very low incomes and were in full-time tuition), the authors found that most students reported positive changes as a result of their participation, especially near the beginning of their involvement.⁹

These changes included:

- Cognitive/academic: improvements in communication, reading, writing and speaking English. For many this resulted in being more “outspoken” about things in their lives. They also reported knowing more about culture, society, rights and responsibilities.
- Psychological/affective: the most frequent change reported was increased confidence; others included increased self-esteem, being more comfortable in a range of situations, feeling proud of their achievements and “just feeling good” because they were doing something besides “laying around” or “sitting around complaining”; some also reported

8 There does not appear to be as direct an impact on the parents’ involvement in schools in adult-only literacy programmes as there is in family literacy programmes (see for example, (National Centre for Family Literacy, 2002; Seaman, Popp, & Darling, 1991; van Fossen & Sticht, 1991).

9 The authors recommend studies that cover at least a three-year period of post-tuition to enable a more complete picture of the changes that occur for the learners.

negative changes of frustration, dissatisfaction and disappointment.

- Social: these included increased independence and especially, sticking up for themselves and “not letting other people walk all over them.”

It is usually assumed that education for adults only results in positive changes, but this is not necessarily always the case (West, 1996). In the Canadian study, some of the learners appeared to go through a downward spiral of changes over the course.

While most of the changes presented ... are positive, feelings expressed by some participants about changes in themselves went through a cycle. It was not uncommon to find that participants began the programme with a positive outlook, feeling good about themselves during the initial months of program involvement. Then as the pressures of home and school mounted and some began to experience difficulty with the program, they became increasingly discouraged. One woman expressed her disappointment this way, “I don’t know why I so stupid. I not progress. My English is still the same before.” ... Some of the downward cycle was related to perceptions of job opportunities. As program participants saw their classmates completing programs and failing to improve their job prospects they too, began to feel concerned that they “may end up in the same job” as before. (op. cit., p. 16)

The authors concurred with Smith’s observation (1987, quoted in West, p. 17) that the meaning of literacy is different for males and females because of their social roles; ... a primary motivation for males has to do with the maintenance of public face and in adults, redemption from failure. For females, the appeal is the acquisition of skills enabling them to fill secondary support roles. (ibid.)

Finally, a meta-analysis (Beder, 2002) of findings from 23 U.S. studies (chosen as “the most credible” in terms of their design, methodologies and reporting) drew the following conclusions about the impact of adult literacy participation:

- it is likely that participants will achieve gains in employment
- participants believe that their jobs improve over time, but there is insufficient evidence to conclude that participation causes job improvement
- it is likely that participants will gain increased earnings

- a positive influence on participants' continued education
- a reduction in welfare dependence in welfare-sponsored literacy programmes, but inconclusive about the influence of general adult literacy programmes;
- learners perceive gains in reading, writing and mathematics skills
- insufficient evidence using tests to conclude these gains;¹⁰
- ABE participation increases gains in GED pass rates
- positive impacts on learners' self-image
- learners report positive impact on parental involvement in children's education
- learners perceive achievement of personal goals.

North American research — qualitative studies

As indicated earlier, increasing attention has been given to ethnographic and qualitative research over the past twenty years or so. This type of research is seen as invaluable in complementing the quantitative studies by providing a broader understanding of impact (Bingman & Ebert, 2000). Research by Fingeret (1992) and Quigley (1990) among others have shown the value of placing emphasis on the impact of contextual factors and various critical theories and theories of resistance.

Some writers (see for example, Auerbach, 1994) have argued that adult literacy programmes should be conceptualised as far more than the simple development of reading and writing skills, and Stein argues that many adult literacy students themselves understand that literacy is more than development of individual skills (Stein, 1995). Although the desire to read and write initially motivates many adults to enrol in literacy programmes, a study by Ziegahn (1992) found that non-participants strongly associated learning to read and write with schooling, and saw their own learning as separate from reading and writing.

Our understanding of literacy has changed from [a] focus on individual skills, separated from meaningful content . . . to see[ing] that literacy is connected to the

10 Beder poses the oft-stated question of the technical inadequacy of the tests available.

social, historical, political, cultural, and personal situations in which people use their skills. (p. 3)

Imel (1996) argues that when adult literacy educators base their programs on the assumption that literacy is only about developing discrete skills such as reading and writing, they are also delivering a message which equates literacy with schooling, and presenting literacy education as having very narrow goals and purposes.

Closely related to the recognition that literacy is more than the development of discrete skills, is the growing recognition that programmes must be structured in ways that address the diverse groups of learners and reflect the contexts in which people use their skills (Fingeret 1992).

Within literacy education, a great deal of attention has been focused historically on individualising instruction to meet individual needs. Imel points out that, although there is nothing inherently wrong with this notion, a preoccupation with focusing on individuals can suppress issues of gender, race, and class — issues that reproduce the realities of the lives of many adult literacy students. Many non-participants associate literacy educators' lack of attention to the broader contexts in which they live their lives with schooling. To them, school is simply a place that transmits the values of the mainstream society and they find it irrelevant.

A study by Quigley (1990) built on this idea. His focus was on understanding non-participation in literacy and adult basic education as a form of resistance.

Typically, non-participation in literacy and ABE programs is conceptualised either in psychological terms as a motivational issue, or as a 'barriers issue' wherein problems are seen to be located within delivery institutions or within the social, cultural, and economic environments which surround non-participants ... [The] assumptions [underlying these explanations] effectively diminish perceived capacity for human agency among non-participants and tend to reinforce stereotypes (p. 103).

Drawing on resistance theory as represented in the work of people such as Willis (1977, 1979) and Giroux (1983a, 1983b), Quigley described the variety of ways in which characters drawn from ten works of literary fiction resisted formal schooling. He

argued from this that non-participation and 'drop-out'¹¹ by some adults should also be seen as a form of resistance, and that these people do not necessarily resist learning as such, but merely the kinds of traditional formalised ways in which learning and knowledge is presented.

A study by Sparks (1998) also intended to throw light on issues of non-participation in adult basic education or English literacy programmes from the perspective of non-participating Chicano/as or Mexican-Americans. She conducted in-depth interviews with thirty people aged between 18 and 62, 75% of who had previously engaged in adult basic education programmes. The following key themes emerged from the interviews with these learners:

- Exclusion: "I wasn't getting any help." Feelings of being left out, of being neglected, of the teacher choosing to communicate with others in the class, of 'walking away' from them and their questions.
- Invisibility: "Nobody seemed to notice if I was there or not. The teachers didn't seem to care." Feelings of being left to fend for themselves, of being invisible. "They acted as if we weren't even there."
- Inferior status: "I was told, 'Let's see how can I get through to your kind'." A sense of anger and indignation at the humiliation and discrimination people experienced.
- Lack of effective learning environment: "You really couldn't get into it." Noisy classrooms and a lack of commitment to serious study were mentioned.
- Poor organisation: "They weren't too helpful, maybe because there was too many people." Many programmes were poorly organised e.g. documents were lost.
- Poor quality of teaching-learning exchange: "She didn't give us any examples and nobody's catching on." Some of the teaching was poor and people felt that teachers had denied them access to knowledge.
- Lack of respect for cultural identity: "You never forget what you are, no matter how white the world is." "My ethnic background was pushed aside like I was supposed to forget about it."

11 'Drop out' or withdrawal from programmes runs as high as 75% (Quigley, 1997, p. 8). There are no comparable figures available for New Zealand programmes, but it is unlikely that they are as high as these figures.

- Little or no recognition of native language and history:
"They told us to leave our Spanish outside the classroom."
Situations were described where people were made to feel bad about their native language. Little if any Chicano/a history was incorporated in the curriculum.

As a consequence of these, and other continuing experiences of structural discrimination, racism and other exclusionary practices over the centuries, the men and women interviewed for this study had decided that formalized programmes were "not for them" (p. 255). Sparks identified some of the ways in which teachers, learners and the system collided as attempts made (not necessarily deliberately) by administrators and teachers to assimilate participants within dominant linguistic and cultural traditions clashed with Chicano/as attempts to maintain their own cultural traditions and advance their collective educational interests.

Australian research

Brennan, Clark and Dymock (1989) undertook a large study of 521¹² adult literacy students chosen from across Australia to document their expectations of the programmes as well as measuring the outcomes of their tuition as perceived by the students themselves. The students' expectations and outcomes (in response to open-ended questions) are summarised in the table below.

Table 2 – Expectations (priority and total) and outcomes of adult literacy programmes as perceived by students

<i>Type</i>	Priority expectation (%) [*]	Total expectations (%) ^{**}	Outcomes (%) ^{***}
Socio-economic	10.2	11.9	17.9
Personal	7.5	16.1	49.7
Social	3.6	9.9	31.9
Cognitive	62.2	47.6	40.7
Enactive ^{****}	6.5	14.3	33.4
None	9.6	-	15.4
Not shown	.4	.2	.5

^{*} N = 521; ^{**} N = 1013 (multiple responses); ^{***} N = 988 (multiple responses)

^{****} such as filling out a cheque, writing to people

12 Approximately 2% of the total number of people in Australian adult literacy programmes at that time.

Several points can be taken from this data. Firstly, things that learners identify as their outcomes are not necessarily the same things they had expected at the beginning (their expectations change during their tuition). Secondly, cognitive expectations dominate, but they become less prominent as outcomes over time and are similar in ranking to personal, social and enactive outcomes after participating in a programme.

Overall, 438 (84%) of the respondents said that there had been one or more changes in their lives that they attributed to the literacy programmes. Unlike Malicky's Canadian (1996) study quoted earlier, all of the changes were rated positively. The authors confirmed the conclusion of other studies (see for example, Charnley & Jones, 1979) that "confidence is the foundation on which progress is made in literacy" (p. 69). Factors they believed to be integral to producing positive outcomes included:

- an appropriate and supportive climate for learning
- having a 'good tutor' and not having tutors regularly change
- group interaction in class with well designed groups
- having support at home and/or work
- including a counselling function in the programme to help re-define learners' objectives
- appropriate timetabling, access to transport and childcare.

Finally, the authors conclude that pre- and post-testing, using quantitative data is not only inappropriate, but may also be detrimental to the learning process for these students.

A second large-scale Australian study was undertaken by the Assessment Research Centre at The University of Melbourne over the four years from 1992 to 1995 (Griffin, Pollock, Corneille, and Fitzpatrick, 1997). This longitudinal study investigated the destinations of adult literacy students engaged in classes funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The authors emphasise that the department's interest was not to examine reading gains as such, but rather to examine the question "what difference does literacy education make in the lives of adults?" (p. 8) and the wider community.

The lives of individuals were to be examined from the perspective of the educational, employment, community and social changes that took place over the years of the project. Data for the study

were collected over a four-year period from adult literacy students at 32 sites in metropolitan, small town and rural areas in three Australian states, using a mix of survey and case study analysis. The first round of data was collected in 1992–93 by means of face-to-face interviews with 452 people; the second and third rounds used telephone interviews (352 people, 78% of those who had been interviewed a year previously); the third round in 1994–95 consisted of telephone interviews with 330 people (73% of the original sample); finally, the fourth round in 1996–96, used a mailed questionnaire, supplemented by telephone interviews, and succeeded in contacting 275 or 61% of the original sample — a very high retention rate for a longitudinal study, given such a mobile population.

As mentioned previously, in addition to the survey data referred to above, an in-depth ethnographic study of a small number of adult literacy students was undertaken. The study drew on a wide range of documentary evidence as well as quantitative and qualitative evidence taken not only from recorded conversations with the people concerned, but also from family members and others who knew them. The study presented fourteen case studies using information from all these sources. These drew attention to the rich diversity of experiences of adult literacy students, and the wide variety of reasons, expectations and outcomes of participation in these programmes (pp. 91–111).

Like the other Australian study, Griffin et al. found that literacy gains were only a small proportion of the motives for attendance and participation in the classes. Instead they found a multitude of mixed motives for attendance. Many were there because of pressure to acquire the social and economic benefits that they saw as deriving from the classes. Some needed to be able to help with children's schoolwork, while others wanted to gain skills for work.

The study found that in some literacy classes the focus was on English language development; many participants enrolled in literacy classes were engaged in learning the spoken, rather than written language. This finding confirms the wide parameters of literacy.

In spite of this very wide range of reasons, expectations and achievements in literacy classes, the study also found that “participants had developed a noticeable shift in reading and cognitive problem-solving strategies. It appears that the majority of them learnt to read” (p 5). Functional and everyday literacy activities were substantially altered. Moreover, positive changes

were reported in reading and writing, in numeracy activities and in problem-solving strategies.

The classes also affected employment chances, people's promotion opportunities and their confidence in the workplace. Changes in employment status were substantially higher for course participants than for potentially equivalent groups in the community. Structured inequities remained however, with women students who had been out of the workforce having significantly lower chances of returning to it compared with the men.

The findings suggest that participation in the literacy classes had little, if any, long-term impact on participants' self-image and sense of self-esteem. On the other hand, they do appear to have had an effect on social well-being with participants demonstrating an increase in confidence and participation in community activities including increased use of libraries, community centres and social clubs.

A third large-scale Australian study (Rahmani, Crosier & Pollack, 2002) took the form of an evaluation of the Australian Government's Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) programme. Both the somewhat more restricted and targeted nature of the programme and the evaluative nature of the study itself serve to set it apart from the two previous studies.

The LANT programme was established in January 1998 to provide a way in which unemployed 18–24 year-olds with minimal literacy and numeracy skills could satisfy their 'mutual obligation' requirement with government. Early in 1999 LANT was extended to cover a number of other groups of jobseekers with low levels of literacy and/or numeracy. It was intended as a flexible programme of between six and fifteen hours attendance per week for up to 300 or 400 hours depending on initial competency levels.

The overall aim of the evaluation study was to investigate the extent to which the training affected participants' literacy and numeracy skills and participation in the labour market, compared with a comparison group who did not participate in LANT. The evaluation examined the outcomes of the programme in terms of improvements in literacy and numeracy competencies, employment outcomes, income support status and subsequent education or training participation.

The study drew on data from client and administrative records, the programme monitoring undertaken by relevant government departments and a telephone survey. The telephone interviews covered a sample of job seekers eligible to participate in LANT

between August 1998 and October 1999. A total of 2203 usable responses out of a total of 6248 eligible job seekers was obtained. The vast majority (84%) of people who were referred to the programme started the training (starters), while 16% did not participate (non-starters).

Respondents were asked questions about their experiences of the programme, their reasons for starting, their satisfaction with the services provided, their employment, earnings and subsequent education/training participation, and self-perceived improvements in their literacy and numeracy skills. Not surprisingly, the main reason given by participants when joining the programme was to improve their reading, writing and maths, while the main reason given by those who had not participated after being referred to the programme, or who had not completed the course was that they had found employment. The findings on measured literacy and numeracy outcomes were inconclusive as the attempts to test for literacy levels gave rise to anxiety among many participants and increased withdrawals.

However, the vast majority of respondents reported that their literacy and numeracy skills had improved. Eighty-five percent said that the training had been very helpful or helpful in enabling them to improve their reading skills, and similar proportions said that LANT had been very helpful or helpful in improving their writing skills (81%), maths skills (79%), and English speaking skills (83%). In addition, the vast majority of survey respondents who had participated in LANT were very satisfied or satisfied with the training they had received.

Overall, the findings revealed few, if any, differences in employment outcomes, earnings or participation in subsequent education or training, between those respondents who had started training and those who had not started. For example, at the time of the survey, approximately one-third of each group were working in a paid job and about the same percentage (between 25% and 30%) had enrolled in subsequent education or training programmes. In evaluating these findings the report points out that the 'non-starters' were more 'job ready' than the participants, and that there is evidence from the U.S. that many of the effects of literacy and numeracy improvements are only apparent in the long-term.

The report emphasises the need for a cautious assessment of LANT's effectiveness in achieving its objectives, and a number of suggestions are made of ways in which the programme might be further improved in the light of the findings. On the other hand, it also suggests that there is evidence that the programme had

made a difference to the lives of at least some of the participants, and that more attention should be given to the need for high quality data for future evaluations.

New Zealand studies

Adult literacy in New Zealand remains a seriously under-researched field of study (Benseman, 2003a), but there have been several pieces of research that relate to the present study. Most however have been qualitative and involved small samples, which limits their 'generalisability' (enabling the research results to be generalised out to larger groupings of people).

Benseman's study of the Auckland Adult Literacy Scheme included feedback on the effects on the learners' lives since starting their tuition (Benseman, 1989). The data was gathered from interviews with 39 learners who had been in the Scheme for a minimum of six months and questionnaires from 33 tutors. The learners' evaluations of their experiences in the Scheme were overwhelmingly positive, even when their literacy skill gains appeared quite minor such as being able to write their name and address correctly for the first time. The report concluded that the impact of tuition on learners was most frequently expressed in terms of gaining self-confidence, which in turn gave them a sense of controlling the daily decisions they made and more generally, a feeling that they were more "in control" — many for the first time in their lives. This is illustrated in one of the interviewee's summary of what her involvement had meant for her (p. 77).

I want to spread the word that there's a place where adults can go and take control over their own lives. I don't want to be a drain on society. I'm contributing to it — getting power over my own life. I'd like to read for pleasure. I look at people reading on a bus and think 'you lucky sod 'cause a lack of literacy has bugged my life. (Lorraine)

Sue Caswell's master's thesis reported on the perceptions of progress that 20 adult literacy students from the South Auckland Literacy Scheme made (Caswell, 1992). Of the 20 students, four felt that they had not made any improvement in their literacy skills over a six-month period, eleven reported a small improvement and five reported a large improvement. Overall however, she reported that the majority of the students felt that they had made gains in terms of affective personal achievement and increasing self-confidence. Caswell noted that,

... feelings of inferiority or lack of confidence may not be recognised as problems when students first enter a

literacy programme or they may be hidden by more educationally-acceptable needs. The participants in this study initially appeared to see their needs in terms of acquiring the skills of reading and writing and it was only after a period of time that they recognised that there were other problems. It is these 'other problems' however that the literacy scheme seems to be most successfully ameliorating. (p. 20–21)

Tobias has reported preliminary findings from an ongoing study looking at the experiences and perspectives on learning and education of people from working class backgrounds who have little or no experience of formal post-compulsory education. The initial report (Tobias, 1998) was based on in-depth interviews with a small sample of people who had left school early. Although it is not focused exclusively on adult literacy, the study does draw attention to the fact that the impact of educational and training programmes (including adult literacy) programmes cannot be assessed in isolation from their wider social contexts. It supports the notion that people's participation in learning activities, and the effects of these activities, are heavily influenced by a wide range of social forces and that they cannot be understood without viewing them in a broad historical perspective. The study thus draws attention to the impact on people's experiences and perspectives of class, gender and race, along with many other factors. These factors include size of family, urban and rural backgrounds, experiences at home and at school as a youngster, formal and informal networks at home and with family, friends, work-mates and colleagues at home, in the neighbourhood, at the workplace and more generally in civil society.

A study undertaken by the Canterbury Adult Basic Education Research Network (CABERN) investigated the experiences of a small sample of participants in adult literacy programmes in Christchurch (Boyd, Cates, Hellyer, Leverton, Robinson & Tobias, 2002). The study involved in-depth interviews conducted very informally and conversationally by the participants' tutors. The interviewees' stories were in one sense not surprising and match closely with the findings from the other research already reviewed. The study however also highlighted the uniqueness of each person's story. It pointed to the diversity of literacy learners and cast doubt on the validity of attempting to develop generalisations about people with literacy difficulties.

In terms of the wider context, a number of factors were identified that had a powerful influence on the literacy learning of the people interviewed. Interviewees commented favourably on their experiences of the literacy learning programmes and

distinguished them sharply from their experiences of initial schooling. Several referred positively to increases in self-confidence and self-esteem as well as literacy and numeracy skills. Improved computer skills were also mentioned, especially as an important learning tool. As a result of their 'second chance' learning experiences, several participants said that they had become more aware of their capabilities and that they wanted to use them for further personal development as well as to help others.

This study also sheds some light on why these people had returned to literacy learning. Whilst the need for employment and the presence of the 'work ethic' was a significant factor and participants had been referred by agencies like the Department of Work and Income and Workbridge, the importance of wanting to be a good parent and of helping their children as a motivating factor occurred several times and it is also clear that support from family members (or some other significant other such as a partner, close friend or another student) was a key factor in determining whether participants continued on the programme.

The study suggests that some people only return to formal literacy learning in their late-20s, 30s or 40s because they need to put some distance between negative school and other learning experiences as a child or young person and coming back to formal learning as an adult, while for others this return may coincide with their children needing help with homework or changes in their working lives. Another motivation was wanting to learn by finding a particular aim for study — the wish to help others, to understand themselves, to increase self-confidence or self-esteem, to gain a particular qualification, or to work towards some more specific goal which may impose its own demand for the development of new literacy practices.

In a study of participants in a workplace literacy programme, nine interviewees identified a wide range of impacts that their participation had brought about in their lives, some of which were not immediately obvious or occurred in the immediate environment of the workplace (Benseman, 2000). These changes included:

- improved levels of skill in reading, writing, spelling and maths: not surprisingly, they all saw this type of outcome as the main thing they had achieved
- assertiveness skills: one woman felt that she had also learnt practical skills to keep herself safe from unwanted attention

- knowledge and information: in the course of learning literacy skills, they also learnt additional information about their work as well as general issues
- achieving formal qualifications: for virtually all of these learners, the passing of Qualification Framework unit standards were the first educational qualifications they had ever passed and certainly the only ones since leaving school
- increased understanding of learning principles: such as understanding the mathematical principles of decimals involved in the use of a calculator
- improved accuracy: such as the more accurate use of calculators and completing forms accurately on the first attempt
- improved oral skills: partly as a result of greater confidence, but also as a result of specific skills taught in courses, some reported that they found it much easier to give oral reports on their work
- learning skills transferred to other contexts: such as increased confidence to enrol in other company courses that they had avoided in the past because of a lack of learning confidence.

The report also pointed out that change also occurred as a result of what happened indirectly to the learners in the process of learning new skills.¹³ These *secondary* changes were not necessarily sought directly by the educators in the programme, but occurred 'downstream' in the educational process. For the group of learners in the *Voices* study, these *secondary* level changes included:

- greater personal confidence: apart from better literacy skills, this was probably the other main benefit that participants in these programmes identified, even though it was rarely identified as something they wanted when they began

13 These 'ripple' effects lead to what Sticht calls 'double duty dollars'; budgets spent in one context have beneficial effects in other spheres of learners' lives (Sticht, 2000).

- cross-cultural skills: especially for the Pasifika learners, which enable them to interpret Palangi behaviour and practices
- better industrial goodwill: while providing learning resource centres is no cast iron guarantee of ensuring company loyalty, most of the learners said that they felt a greater degree of loyalty to the company and were grateful for the educational opportunities they had been offered
- higher aspirations: three of the participants said that they wanted to move on to higher skill occupations because they felt more confident as learners
- achieving pay rises: as some of the workplaces linked their skill increases to pay scales, successful learning meant pay increases
- acquiring a thirst for learning: most said that they now wanted to continue their learning because they also now actually enjoyed the process of learning (usually for the first time in their lives)
- impacts at home and in the community: not always easy to measure, but better literacy skills and learning also extended well beyond the context where the skills are learnt. One interviewee reported a new-found interest in talking about computers with his teenage daughters, another was working hard to help her son pass School Certificate, a third reported that he no longer needed to take his wife on the back of his motor-bike to read street signs for him, others reported greater interest in their children's homework and greater confidence in helping their children with homework.

Comparable findings have been found in U.S. workplace literacy studies (see for example, Freer & Spruitenberg, 1996).

The final New Zealand study reviewed involved 64 Training Opportunities trainees carried out by AC Nielsen for Skill New Zealand (AC Nielson, 1999). Although this study was not focused on adult literacy learners, the group studied was very comparable to the learners that are the focus of this present study and would certainly have included some adult literacy learners, even though they are not identified specifically in the report. The study included an initial phase when the trainees had recently graduated, a second phase, six months after the trainees had completed their courses (which included 60 of the original 64 subjects) and a third

phase 12 months after completing their courses (52 subjects). In the first phase there were consistent references to the following benefits:

- experiencing a positive educational environment (including passing unit standards); for many this was their first experience of this type
- the advantages of work experience opportunities
- gains in new skills and qualifications led to increases in their self esteem, confidence and motivation
- greater interest in further education
- better skills and interest in obtaining employment.

Six months further on, 19 of the 60 respondents were employed, another 19 were in further education programmes and 22 were unemployed. Reflecting on their experiences in Training Opportunities, the employed group felt that they had gained:

- improved communication skills
- respect for people in authority
- greater initiative for contacting employers
- ability to prepare a CV
- preparation for interviews
- better understanding of what was expected in employment.

For the group who had gone on to further education (predominantly school-leavers rather than long-term unemployed), the main benefit was greater self-confidence as learners. Those who were unemployed spoke about a number of fears — “fear of rejection, fear of not being able to cope with the work they would be expected to do, fear of computer technologies and concern that the pace of work would be too fast” (op. cit., p. 13).

In the third phase, 19 of the 52 contacted were employed, 11 were in employment, three were in further education and 19 were unemployed. The main point made from this third phase was that while a majority of the trainees had relatively stable outcomes (i.e. persisting in one type of transition or progressing between employment and/or education and training), just under half (19) were still on an “erratic pathway” or were showing few signs of

being able to gain even short-term employment. However only four of the 19 were classified as ‘unemployed and not motivated to seek employment’.

Other points of note made by the study’s authors included:

- benefits of training decline if not used; thus “if a trainee does not move into employment within 3–6 months of training completion, the confidence and motivation gained will steadily decline” (p. 19)¹⁴
- there appeared to be no discernible differences between trainees due to ethnicity or their length of unemployment – “at all stages in the analysis the data was examined for any differences. However the common issues faced by low skill individuals ... seemed to override any ethnic or eligibility differences” (ibid.)
- on-going support beyond Training Opportunities helped maintain and build on the gains made in the programmes.

14 This conclusion confirms the findings of the British study discussed earlier (Bynner & Parsons, 2000).

CHAPTER 4

Early experiences of family, school and work

Introduction

Like all learners, adult literacy students bring a deeply textured range of previous experiences and backgrounds to their literacy learning. Their formative experiences are important influences on their attitudes, knowledge and skills, both as people and as learners. This chapter therefore explores their backgrounds before they attended the literacy programmes.

It is important to note that we are not aiming to analyse why these experiences occurred in families, schools or workplaces. Explaining why some families provide more supportive environments than others or why some schools achieve positive results while others do not, is a complex undertaking and beyond the scope of this report. Rather, we are concerned with reporting the range of experiences participants had and discussing the effects the interviewees say these factors have had on their development as learners.

Family

The interviewees were asked whether or not their parents were interested in what they did at school. Sixty-one percent of those who responded to this question said that their parents were either 'interested' or 'very interested'; 19% said they were neutral; while 20% said that they were 'not interested' or 'not interested at all'. Interviewees were then asked if they felt that there had been anything specific about their childhood experiences at home and at school that had affected their literacy skills. Many spoke of experiences in their families they felt had hindered them both emotionally and as learners. This is not to say that all, or even most, literacy students have had predominantly negative family experiences; rather, it points to the fact that for some, their upbringing was not a positive experience, and even a very unhappy time of their lives.¹⁵

15 It is difficult to speculate whether this pattern is typical of all New Zealand children in the absence of comparative data.

Some had experienced difficulties as children but nevertheless felt largely unaffected by these events. Lee's parents had divorced and she had been separated from her father:

My mother and father broke up when I was about seven. I found that really hard because I was always Dad's girl. We were really close. He was a good Dad ... He never put my mother down because he didn't want to hurt us. They didn't see much of each other, but they were always on friendly terms.

Others, however, went through similar experiences, but were strongly affected by them. Noel, for example, saw his parents' splitting up as having a very negative influence on his learning not only in his home environment but also because of their lack of interest in what he was doing in school.

My parents split up when I was about eleven and that was pretty hard on everyone... 'Cause yeah, I had to take responsibility for a lot more things ... [responsibilities] that I didn't really want at that age. So yeah, I think home environment has a lot to do with the way kids learn and want to learn ... My parents were too worried about what they were doing to each other, who was going to win the next battle ... and we got shoved in the middle.

Some interviewees recounted specific periods during their childhoods that had few positive features. In Tony's life, this involved moving around quite a bit between the ages of two and eight. He began by going to several different schools.

Just the usual — broken homes, foster homes, moving from one school to the next every month. I lived in [five towns] ... I was in Primer One for about two years 'cause I didn't know where I was. So yeah, [that was] from the time I started school to the time that I was about ... eight or nine, [when] we stopped moving around.

Ruth's family circumstances and her mother's ill-health meant that she had not only additional responsibilities within the family, but also little support or help with her schoolwork. Asked if her parents were interested in helping her with her reading, she replied:

They were a wee bit interested, but with six other children, it was difficult ... Being the oldest made it a bit harder. Yes, it's often the oldest that gets the extra responsibilities, especially if you've got a sick mum.

Major crises in parents' lives inevitably had 'knock-on' effects for the children, which in some cases were profound. Jordan said events in his father's life were a big influence on his own learning.

My father went to jail for first-degree murder and that really set me back. Most of the problems I had were in my high school because other students found out about it and I was branded the son of a murderer. Now that's got to give some kid a complex. I was always trying to hide from people and then I broke out of a shell and I had this bloke stressing me out at school and I flipped out. Stabbed him at high school and I was asked to leave and I left and then I was sent into like juvenile hall at [institution] and that and those institutions don't promote reading or writing, they promote violence and anger. So I didn't really — you don't really want to think about reading or writing when you're in a place like that. You're thinking, well I've got to cover my arse here 'cause someone might come in and stab me.

Bob had a difficult childhood, which he said was exacerbated by an incident at school. He felt that the fact that his mother was sick and his father was pre-occupied with running the family meant that the incident was not dealt with, as it should have been.

This was an event when I was like eight or nine years old — ten years old maybe, where a young Borstal boy who had been directed to our school had stolen a watch, planted it down somewhere, and I had picked it up and handed it into the Headmaster, because it was a missing item. But the Headmaster chose to believe that I had actually taken it. So he set me up with the Police and I was basically victimised. And, at that particular time my mother was in hospital having cancer treatment .. So I had no real family there to support me through that ... quite a few things were quite upsetting ... and having a learning difficulty on top of all this ...

In some families negative behaviour patterns left their mark on the children. This included verbal abuse, usually from the parents. Mark said that he was surrounded by very poor models of behaviour on virtually every account, which he said affected learning to read.

Everything [affected my reading]. Abusive parents, alcoholism, lying, deceit. A very dysfunctional family, I come from.

While for others such as Tamara there was physical abuse.

I got beaten up by my parents and my cousin on my tenth birthday ... before I was ten years old I'd get slapped quite badly sometimes. But on my tenth birthday I got beaten nearly to death. I had three brothers who'd been getting hidings since they were 18 months old because my father was trying to "make men out of them." Before I was ten my parents often talked about that they couldn't give me a hiding because it would affect my sexual parts, I suppose. But they had this idea that after the age of ten they could give me a hiding. On my tenth birthday they almost killed me.

School

The relationship between schools and children is complex and multi-faceted. For example, schools are primarily responsible for ensuring that their pupils become successful learners, but are also dependent on support from care-givers at home in order to provide optimal learning conditions. Moreover, compulsory schooling is characterised by a range of competing agendas not all of which are conducive to the literacy learning of all students. When either the school or the home is not operating optimally for any individual child, it makes it difficult for the other component to succeed. When both components are not functioning positively, the chances of successful education for the children dwindle dramatically.

Multiple schools

One issue that schools find especially difficult to cope with is children constantly shifting schools. Occasional shifts to new schools for children are often unsettling and sometimes disruptive to learning. Shifting schools many times is almost invariably disruptive. In this study interviewees were asked whether or not they had moved school (other than to change from primary to intermediate to high school), and if so, how many times had they moved. Forty-one percent of the interviewees who responded to this question had not changed school at all, and 16% had shifted once or twice. On the other hand, 27% had shifted between three and five times; and 16% had shifted on six or more occasions.

Families move for a range of reasons, which are not always to do with employment. Irrespective of the reason, the effects were always reported as unsettling emotionally and detrimental to learning.

Probably counting high schools and intermediates and primary schools, I think [I changed schools] about 16 times.

It's a hard situation when kids are getting tormented. You get so depressed; they would try to send you somewhere else so you wouldn't be picked on anymore. (Lee)

Multiple schools and difficult home environments are a particularly toxic combination for children starting their learning journeys and can result in restricted options later as adults.

Patricia said:

Well I never went to school 'cause back then I was the oldest of six, so if I didn't go — nobody bothered. I think it was the lack of school, which was the problem as well. I think it's very important that children actually go to school every day because it gives them a sense of getting up and moving ... I'd say about 27 to 28 different schools I went to as a child — when I went.

And Ellie described her experiences in the following way.

I never really had any education through the time I was growing up 'cause Māori ways, you get shifted from home to home. And we were going to different schools and I ended up with a rough family... so I never got much education. All I knew was to do the practical stuff. Like I knew how to clean a house, cook. I knew how to go out and work. But as soon as the papers come along, I didn't know...

Positive experiences

Like family life, school was a variable experience for the interviewees in this study.¹⁶ The responses overall however, were far more extensive on schooling and were overwhelmingly negative, with 70% of respondents rating their experience as 'negative' or 'very negative'. Only a small number (17% of respondents) saw their school experiences in a positive light. Bob struggled throughout his schooling with subjects involving extensive literacy skills, but found a niche in less academic subjects in which he excelled. He also enjoyed teaching that involved hands-on, practical components. Ultimately, his poor literacy skills meant that he failed School Certificate, but he still rated his experience positively because he felt that he was offered a range of interesting options at high school.

16 It is acknowledged that the fact the interviewees were asked what they believed had affected their literacy skills inevitably meant that comments tended to be negative.

I was streamed into classes that were designed to cope at high school. I had a relatively successful high school, and some of the subjects I was top of the class, like technical drawing, engineering, and woodwork, those subjects I was outstanding at. But I never really got School Certificate due to the fact that my English let me down, badly.

Almost invariably however, the only aspects of school that the interviewees enjoyed were the non-academic, practical subjects. For example Max enjoyed woodwork and metal work and Kim said she enjoyed:

... getting involved in school things, I played golf and I enjoyed doing that, representing the school. I was also in the school choir, the school Māori culture group and helping out in the school production behind the scenes.

Variations across school levels

The interviewees reported a mixture of experiences across the different levels of the schooling system. While some of this variation occurred because of the different levels of teacher skill available, in other cases significant variations from standard educational provision certainly left their mark on some students' educational experiences. Terry said:

The first two years of my education was at a primary school [which] was so far away in the wop wops that we didn't actually have a teacher for a couple of years. We had a local well-meaning lady come in and read us stories and let us play with blocks to our hearts' content. We literally did very little for a couple of years and that's why when the teacher came along he really got stuck into me and abused me. He was frustrated about the fact that no work had been done. No groundwork. He expected to be able to pick us up and whisk us along from where he thought we ought to be and didn't try to go back and make foundations. So primary school ... yes, it was pretty negative really.

Intermediate was quite OK because I went to an intermediate school. Even though I recognised I had a problem, and tried to catch [up], they didn't or couldn't or, there just weren't enough recognition of catch-up programmes at that stage. They just put you in the too-hard basket almost. Like at high school, I'm sure that that's what that class was sort of ... you know people used to be quite derogatory of the fact that people were in that classroom. It was a bit painful at times, but we got the benefits of going off to work experience and things like that, which made up

for it and eased us into the work force, in a way that a lot of people were successful.

Primary schools have often provided additional help for pupils having difficulty with their literacy skills, but in most cases, this was not as readily available at secondary level. For Aaron

Primary was quite good 'cause I had a reading teacher trying to teach me how to read, but then I went to intermediate and well yeah, that just got chucked out the door. Then I went to high school then yeah, just bunked. End of term ... 4th Form I don't go at all and then the start of 5th Form, until the end of that term. 'Cause it was just too much of a struggle 'cause teachers assume that you can read and they ain't got the resources to actually sit down and talk with just one kid and there's actually like twenty kids in one class. Didn't like high school at all, it was quite embarrassing actually.

And for Barry

... primary school was great, I mean I was in a sort of special class, but the teacher was wonderful and it wasn't till I got to high school I found it was sort of negative... Yeah 'cause the teachers didn't know what to do like, there was four people in my class who couldn't read or spell very well and the teachers didn't know what to do. They didn't have anybody to teach us for what we needed to know till they brought in a retired teacher who taught us differently. He taught us away from the class.

A few had the opposite experience of not receiving help at primary school, but then being offered specialist tuition when they got to intermediate or secondary levels.

Scott went to school for five years before it was acknowledged that he had a vision problem and needed glasses:

My primary school wasn't great because they didn't understand the problem I had, so they just pushed me up the back of the classes. But I didn't have [glasses], so I couldn't see the board, and I fell further behind. Intermediate was probably the first time I actually got some extra help and then high school and then the [adult literacy] course.

While those who did receive additional help with their literacy appreciated this, the variation of help throughout the education system often meant that the issues were not consistently

addressed. Colin for example, was excited about the help he received from one teacher, but was disappointed when she was no longer available to work with him.

When I was about 8 and I had just moved [to a new school] I had a teacher [who helped me]. I only had her for a very short period of time because she could only spend so much time with each school. And when I started, she'd already spent quite a bit of her time there so I only got to spend a small amount of time with her to start correcting my problem. I'd just started making progress and she had to move on.

Schooling experiences generally

Selecting quotes about schooling was difficult only because there were so many to choose from. Some comments were short and to the point.

School was horrible. It was like a nightmare. I could not compare it.... School was a hole and that's putting it lightly. (Paul)

Like, some of the teachers at school when I was at school like hit me over the knuckles with rulers and I'm like left-handed and forcing you to write with your right hand, it was a bit backdated. So yeah, I had a lot of difficulty at school. (Tony)

School was a constant battle for me. I had to fight the urge to sock someone every day. The thing in primary I could deal with. In secondary, the boys were a bunch of smart arses. I really didn't enjoy my school time. (Lance)

For Jessica, primary school was a hazy memory, apart from the place where she said she spent a lot of time.

I can't really remember primary school very much. I remember playing in the sand pit. Whenever school was being done, I was out in the sand pit, I remember that part.

Others elaborated at length about a system where they found little help with their learning problems and were constantly harassed and discriminated against in a system they saw as catering only for 'bright kids'.

For Jordan, school was a source of frustration, which he felt became a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of being a 'kid with an attitude'.

I have difficulty hearing and seeing... I was always pushed to the back of the class and told just to shut up and sit down. And I used to be a troublemaker at school and with my father going to prison, I was given a reputation there and I was given the branding of the bad boy. So I had to [keep] up with that, you know causing trouble and getting nasty and I was actually asked to leave high school at fourteen. Very negative.

... it just all builds up and then you feel insignificant and low, a piece of rubbish sitting in the corner. So then you get to the point 'well why I am here? I could be out there doing something better for myself' ... I was acting up 'cause I wanted attention and that sort of thing.

For Marie, schooling was a living hell — an experience she still recalls with dread.

I was tormented and kids put my head down the toilet, tried to catch my hair on fire, they would take my shoes off me and I would have to walk home from school. I was tormented and I didn't have any friends through school because of being a slow learner. Therefore I found it really hard to make friends. I was scared of people because of the torment from kids picking on me all the time. I was very lonely right through school.

Key events

In talking about negative school experiences, many respondents identified key incidents, which they saw as pivotal in starting what was to become for them a saga of physical and emotional pain. Some of the incidents had nothing to do with teaching directly. Richard said:

I think I enjoyed it [school] till I was about six. ... I seemed to enjoy the sports side of it. Academically, I wasn't closed down. I believe I was ignored. It was the environment that made me shut down. Again there was a lot of kids in one class. Then [a teacher] beat the crap out of this boy who had polio in one arm and a lame leg. I remember it was in the summer of '64 or '62. We came back from lunch and this boy had annoyed [the teacher] for some reason and he grabbed him and beat the crap out of him till we jumped the teacher, four or five us. We beat the crap out of him. But we got called off to the head teacher and got sent home for a couple of days. Came back and the teacher had been removed. I can still see him. He took off his glasses and stopped halfway in beating this kid. All the windows were open 'cause we were hot on the second floor. Buses used

to stop outside; people were looking up, listening to the screaming. He went along and banged all the windows closed. Picked up his glasses and started beating him again.

As far as Tamara was concerned, it all started on the first day when her excited expectations rapidly disappeared.

I hated it. Actually I think I should say before I started primary school when I about five years old, I really, really looked forward to it. I was very excited but when I got to school. My teacher strapped me on my first day at school and I'd never been hit before. I thought I was going to die. Apparently my mother had told her something I didn't quite understand. I started school on my fifth birthday. There was something that I had trouble understanding and my mother tried to explain to her. The teacher was only 16. In those days you did about three months teachers college and then started teaching. Mind you, you kept learning while you were doing but she was a sixteen-year-old kid. But she didn't quite listen to my mother and she'd been told by the other kids. My family weren't liked in the area that I lived in, that I was a brat, a spoiled brat. And so she thought I needed to be strapped. I used to throw tantrums a lot. I don't know if I was a spoiled brat or just plain bad-tempered.

While for others such as Colin, key incidents were directly related to reading.

When I was about eight, I had just recently moved from [town] down to [town] and I was just starting a new primary school. My father took me down to see the principal, and I thought that was OK, 'just going to sign up new papers...' and everything would be rosy, but the principal actually gave me a test to see my ability where I was at in my reading and spelling. He made me read words and so forth and I was unable to read them and I sort of broke down and cried, which I felt quite tragic about 'cause I was in a strange town in a strange place, being forced to do something I hadn't done before. At that age, the school I had been at, we just naturally just read things. We hadn't really specifically just targeted any one word. And I found it quite strange and different, hadn't been tested that way before. So that had an impact on me after that.

For others, the critical incidents were related to events outside the classroom, such as Fatima's period of illness — which she felt she didn't overcome until she was an adult.

What happened was when I was in Standard Four I got really ill and I had to stay away from school for three months. And when I came back I managed to catch up on everything else, but I couldn't catch up on maths. I needed to do the whole three months and my teacher would only give me two lessons and it wasn't enough. My father tried to tutor me, but I didn't understand a word. And after that I went to a horrible school where when I was doing maths the other kids would interrupt me and make noises and bang the book and do everything they could to stop me from doing maths because they knew that I wasn't good at it. So I gave it [maths] up in the fourth form 'cause I knew that I would fail School Cert. I knew what I needed, but I just couldn't do it. I didn't do anything about it until 1995. All that time my father had been asking me to go and learn maths somewhere. In 1995, I decided to work in gardens which involved, if you want to do higher study, you have to have at least sixth form maths so then I started learning maths.

Peers

Social relationships with peers are an integral part of school life. For many of the interviewees, their social life (or lack of it) at school was a major reason for disliking school. John had enjoyed being in a remedial class at primary school because 'we all had the same problems,' so that when he went to secondary school, he saw himself as someone who was keen and wanted to learn. He soon found it extremely difficult to achieve this because of the behaviour of other pupils who had little interest in schoolwork.

When I went to high school, I was in a lower class, it was mixed class. They had rough people and quiet people. And the rough people would pick on the quiet people like myself. When I went to my other class on the other side of the school, my maths and my science, they were like being clowns, I couldn't concentrate.

Ron also found his non-interested peers a frustration in his efforts to gain teacher attention.

I *wanted* to learn. I wished that I could take the science and maths teachers that I wanted and say, "why don't you tutor me? I want to learn — they don't. Fuck them, you can teach me.'

For some, school was as difficult outside the classroom as inside because of the social environment of their peers. Ruth said, “They used to call me ‘dummy’ and ‘stupid’ when I was at school.” But most commonly, the issue was bullying by others — especially when the victims were in low-stream classes or did not match macho images.

Lee’s mother was very supportive of her daughter’s education, but felt powerless to prevent the constant bullying her daughter endured. With little help from the school, she saw her only strategy was to shift her daughter to a new school when it became intolerable.

School was very negative. The teachers didn't do much about the bullying. They didn't do much about kids being picked on... I went to a lot of schools. Every time I got badly bullied my Mum felt sorry for me, when I cried and wouldn't go back to school. Mum kept trying to put me in other schools to see if the bullying would stop. It never improved.

Teachers

Most interviewees attributed their negative experiences to specific teachers. Thomas was frightened of his teachers who punished him for reasons that eluded him. He still feels that he lives with a stigma from this experience.

I found school very intimidating, primary school. I found adults frightening more than anything else. The punishment they'd inflict for something that I didn't understand or couldn't figure out what I did wrong. Like why should I stand in the dunce's corner with a hat on, what did I do wrong? Just because I couldn't do that particular type of work? Why was I getting my ear pulled? Why was I in a situation where I couldn't figure out what was wrong? If I'd done something wrong, it would've been all right but I was a quiet child. I had one or two lady teachers who loved to pick on me for some reason. [Teacher] was the worst. She used to grab me by the ear. I remember her hitting me across the knuckles for no particular reason just because I was doodling. Because I couldn't do the work, I used to get punished for it. They obviously didn't realise that I had a problem. If they did realise I had a problem, they just were either not interested in helping or thought punishment might've suited the fact that I couldn't do the work that they stuck in front of me. I think that's the only part of my school life that occurred to me is having that stigma follow me

around, and the type of punishment I got when I was child when I didn't do anything wrong basically.

Richard has since worked as a groundsman and has watched teachers' behaviour 'from the inside' and still sees little evidence to convince him that much has changed since his own schooldays.

I worked in the education system for eleven years at [high school]. They didn't know that I couldn't read or write....I used to watch the people with degrees sit up in the staff room, listen to them ridicule kids, and these were supposed to be professionals and have ethics. ... How they thought about students, how they do this, how they do that.... The stories are unbelievable. Kids standing out in corridors for hours on end. They'd send them to me for detention for work parties and such. It's sad what's going on. It really is. And these kids ... I'm talking about seventh formers, just the frustration you can see in their faces. It reminded me a lot of me. I just haven't got respect for the system. The system has to gain respect in my eyes and it hasn't for a lot of people like me. We might be bitter but we have a right to be bitter. It's still happening today to our kids. It maddens me and it scares me. I see them on the streets. Just going off the rails because nobody shows an interest.

While there was much criticism of teachers, there were also some positive comments. 'Good' teachers stood out and were remembered fondly. Some were remembered for their skill in teaching specific subjects, but the most common attribute was that the interviewees felt accepted and recognised by good teachers.

For Emma it was,

... the science teacher, actually I was good at science as well, but I got along well with the science teacher and one of the teachers that I did have I got along really well with and I made an effort towards that, but I mean, if I didn't get along with them I guess I couldn't be bothered. [It depended on] whether or not they respected me, yeah.

Teachers who recognised that the interviewees were having problems with literacy and were able to offer specific teaching skills in this area were also valued highly.

One teacher figured out that I actually had a reading and writing difficulty— two of them did — one when I was at

primary and one when I was in the fifth form. But by then it was too late. (Noel)

Violence

Many of the interviewees referred to physical violence from their teachers.

Yeah, just the way that the — if you didn't do as you were told, you were going to stand out there and everyone was going to watch you get the big leather strap on your hand and all that sort of drama. Yeah, that wasn't a good thing. And that was quite frequent. If it wasn't a strap on the hand it was a smack around the back of the legs or duster thrown at you or something like that. That, that doesn't work. (Martin)

For Diane, the violence came on top of feelings of being a 'loner' among her peers.

One incident occurred when she was eight or nine.

I didn't have many friends. People would make fun of me when I was at school. I didn't really like it too much at school. I remember I tried to run away at school. One of the teachers, I was with ... I got an answer wrong; I had this handicapped kid beside me ... and he wrote down something and I wrote something else down and I thought that he would've got it wrong. I thought that I was better than him. So I wrote this other question down and the teacher came up behind me and thumped me on my back [with her fist] 'cause I got it wrong. I think that might be the reason why I ran away from school. ... I came home and burst into tears. (Diane)

Several interviewees also spoke of sexual molestation (by teachers and fellow pupils) at school.

Literacy experiences at school

It comes as no surprise that specific memories of 'reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic' at school were overwhelmingly negative for our interviewees. The process of learning to read was at best something to be endured.

In the classroom when we had reading and you had groups of people. You had to sit and read a book and a whole bunch of us that couldn't read too well, sat together and read. We had to read out loud to everyone. It was really

bad. I didn't enjoy that at all. Yes, that's when my confidence dwindled away. (Lani)

That was a real problem. I'd write down an answer and I put it down in another part of an area but the answer was right and I put it somewhere else or something. The schoolteacher said that's wrong and so I had to sit in class while everyone was outside and re-do it all. And Mum was there for me, helping it out; she had enough of people trying to put me out. I would get really upset. Some days I'd come home and maybe be in tears. (Diane)

The environment in Brian's class made it difficult for him to seek help with problems in a safe way.

In school it was like you were, I was, at school we were a really small farming community and you were in a class with everyone else and you didn't get the help that you really needed, like explained to you or anything like that. Like, because everyone else in the class sort of picked it up and when you did raise your hand and stuff you were made to feel like you were dumb and you should know it because 'everyone else sort of does' type thing if you know what I mean. You were made example of, like big tests, I remember one big test that we had at school and I think it was about 100 questions and I mean I think I got less than three right and the teacher made an example of it in front of everyone and yeah.

As a struggling student, Tamara simply felt she got lost in a large class.

They had a class of 42. So if you got behind it was too bad.... My Form Two teacher tried to help, but it was really too late. I needed to go back, step by step. That was the thing, they wouldn't go back. The problem was that no one would go back to the Standard Four. And I didn't do that until I did the literacy and numeracy [programme]¹⁷.

At secondary level, the frustration continued, as poor literacy skills affected most subjects and the only escape was to leave school.

When people would write on the board and stuff, I had to copy it down but I took ages to copy it down so I couldn't actually finish it. And they'd rub it off and start again. I was so far behind. (Chris)

17 Throughout, programme names have been removed to protect anonymity.

They just put me in this class where they made me feel so stupid. And then when we sat the mock School Cert. half way through the year, I think I must have got about 14% for English because you know multi-choice, I just circled anything because I just couldn't do it. And yeah, I mean the school made sure everyone knew that I got the lowest in the whole 5th form. (Melinda)

[School was] negative and sometimes embarrassing. 'Cause some teachers would make you try and stand up and read in a class and if you can't read 'you can't read can ya?' So no, they used sort of to embarrass you at times. I never used to — I'd just pack a pikey and go home. (Hanna)

Despite the level of difficulty most interviewees experienced at school, their parents were not always aware of the seriousness of the issue.

Well, it annoys my mother now because in my school reports there was no indication of how bad I was doing at school. From primary school all I had was 'Barry needs to do harder.' But there was no indication to her till after I'd actually left school that I was as bad off as I was [even] though she had some idea I wasn't as good as other people. (Barry)

Remedial programmes

Seventy percent of our interviewees received special help with their literacy skills at school. However the usefulness of this help was rated variably. Forty-four percent of respondents felt that this help had been useful to them, and 8% were undecided on its usefulness. However 48% rated the special help as 'not useful' or 'not useful at all'.

When they received effective help with their reading at school, people like Lance valued this help highly in what was otherwise a saga of neglect and frustration.

But like I said [one particular school] was the one bright spot. That's where my mother finally got listened to. I was about 14 I suppose. The school really came to the thing with saying, 'OK, he's going to need this and that.' They really came to the party. They really helped me out. The help I got there was amazing.

In some cases however (especially at secondary level), the teachers allocated to helping simply didn't have the appropriate skills to address the learners' problems.

Yeah it was excellent, even though it didn't address ... guess what, I got the Head of the English department in my fifth form year at [college] and he'd never ever taken a slow learning group in his life. He gave up after the third term I think and he actually said to us in front of the class that "I will never do this again". He was a great literary man and all the rest of it but when it came to working with people with difficulties, he had no experience. (Bob)

While in most cases, the help was not systematic or sustained, resulting in a 'hit and miss' approach overall.

Primary school — I [got help] when I was young, probably about — might have been — eight. At high school apparently I was supposed to have a teacher-aide, but that never really occurred because one of the teachers said I was OK. I still found, I think I actually started to realise that I actually probably needed a teacher-aide because I could read the questions, but I couldn't actually write down the answers properly or if I could, I needed the teacher-aide to read the questions to me. (Kim)

Because the schools were often not able to help with their children's difficulties, some parents sought help outside the school — but this was no guarantee of success either.

My parents knew I couldn't read very well and they got a lady who was doing that sort of thing to help me out at school. But that was really horrible 'cause she used to get mad at me if I couldn't pronounce the words right.... And she actually happened to be my next-door neighbour, which was even worse. ... It doesn't help if you get yelled at and growled at when you can't read something right ... You don't teach a person by yelling at them or knocking them on the fingernails, having a ruler slapped on your fingers. You don't learn that way. You learn to shut up that way. (Lee)

But even when help is offered, it takes a motivated learner for changes in skill to occur. Several interviewees acknowledged (with the benefit of hindsight) that they were totally uninterested and uncooperative at that time.

See I'm not sure 'cause well, yeah 'cause of the how do you put it — I was a little shit back then. So whatever went through one ear just went straight out the other. And it was real hard for anyone to really teach me. (Aaron)

It probably would have been useful if I'd made the effort. I'd just experiment with booze and drugs and generally having a good time - or what I thought was going to be a good time.
(Tony)

'Special class'

Many of those interviewed for this study had spent at least some time at school in a 'special class' of some description. Some of these classes were geared specifically to teaching literacy skills, but most were simply 'low stream' classes for those who were seen as not coping with mainstream programmes. In some cases, interviewees placed in these classes felt they were totally misplaced. Given the stigma of these classes within schools, it is not surprising that most hated the experience and some felt that they should not have been placed there simply for learning difficulties.

A few such as Brian found the tuition offered in these classes useful because it was aimed at their specific learning needs.

It got a bit better when I moved from there into town and they had another classroom that was set aside for people who were like me which was quite good ... I got more help there and it was sort of good because once again the people who were in the class were like you behind and didn't quite get it like everyone else did and the teacher sort of knew that so she was more patient and explained things in fine detail type of thing. That was really helpful.

But most hated the experience of being in these classes because of the derogatory labels that went with it and the derision from peers. Paul said:

I just found it a complete waste of time. By the time I got to the third form—I hadn't learned anything over the last two years before I got there, so I was totally [uninterested] and so far behind that I spent most of my time trying to cover up not being able to keep up with everyone else. But they did put me in a class where we were all in the same boat. We were at the very end of it all. We were the class of 'stupid people' really. And of course we were all like that and there was a class of say 25 of us. And of course we were all going through puberty. Some of them were a little bit more dysfunctional than others. Of course no one wanted to learn because we were so far behind anyway. So no work got done. No one was interested. We never did what we were told. We would walk out of the classroom, we wouldn't do

any more. It was really a lost cause. By the time we all turned 15, we all left.

And John said,

They were the kids that got teased the most at high school. They were all the nerdy ones and all the other kids would make fun. When they found out that I was in that class, that's when they started picking on me. Walking around the school, I'd get pointed at ... It was [bad]. I try to forget about high school. [I left because] I just couldn't handle people teasing and I was always in tears. It made it very tough, so I left school.

Martin found this type of environment extremely disruptive and damaging to his self-confidence.

At [high school] there was a policy of people who were underachieving were put in one classroom and they were basically left to play up, act the goat, things gets broken it was just a very disruptive atmosphere and the whole school said like, "oh that's 3KF, you're all dummies, you belong there". So OK, you were labelled that and you started to believe it too which was worse. That's the way it was.

Lee said that these sorts of experiences were common among those with her on the adult literacy course.

A lot of people I spoke to had similar experiences, had been picked on and had nasty things happen after school, and had their head put down the toilet too. Mean things that kids did. Some of them used to pretend to be sick so they didn't have to go to school. I used to run away from school and try and climb through the window. I was just so frightened all the time. It's nice to see that there are others — that I wasn't the only one that had learning difficulties and was punished at school for it. It's nice to not feel alone.

Being in these low stream classes did not mean that the pupils received specialist teaching. Indeed, as Thomas recalls, there was often less focus to the teaching than in a conventional classroom.

I went from classroom to classroom right up to Standard Four as a child and the teacher there, of the primary school, said "oh did you know your child has a reading problem?" and they tested me. "Oh this child is retarded, let's put him in a special class." Do you know what happened when we went to the special class? Sing songs in the morning around a

piano. Teacher told us to copy the work off the black board. And telly in the afternoon.

As a parent, Alan's father (interviewed with Alan) said that he and his wife regretted letting Alan be put in a special class and especially the way he was pushed from class to class.

Special classes: he was in a normal state primary education system, but they decided ... *somebody* decided, that he would go from *this* special class to *that* special class, to *that* special class. He was in about four different special classes within about two years. Somebody else decided that he was going to be doing it. Not us. Unfortunately, we went along for the ride. We probably shouldn't have.

Leaving school

The age at which interviewees left school varied widely. Twenty-eight percent left when they were 17 or over, and 16% when they were 16. Although a few of these participants had achieved some School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and Bursary subject passes, the vast majority left school with no qualifications. Moreover forty-four percent left school at age 15, and 13% when they were younger than 15.

Given the comments about schools, it can be seen that leaving school came as a welcome relief for most. In some cases, the school authorities actively encouraged the interviewees to leave, while a ready supply of jobs provided an additional incentive for others.

Because I had gone through that slow learning group, got to the end of the year, and it was like everyone in the class had a job by the end of the year. I think there were two people left in the classroom when I left and I was one of the last five to get a job, sort of thing. So the kids literally got jobs and disappeared as the term finished. They all just disappeared. (Bob)

Leaving school before he was 15 was not a problem for Tony, with a job and the prospects of adult life waiting for him. It was a 'mutual agreement' between him and the deputy principal.

Well basically I got the job 'cause I wanted to get out of school and I got the job and so I was allowed to leave 'cause the teachers had no problem with it. I wasn't doing any good, so yeah. It was basically the deputy principal's suggestion, "either get a job or you're not doing any good here". So off I

went, got one... I was happy to do that. That meant money, more booze and more drugs.

An interesting comment [about school] came from Richard who left school at 12 to help support his family.

I didn't like the environment. I did like going to school, but I didn't think I was happy there. I wanted to learn.

Perceptions of school

In talking about their schooling experiences, interviewees made some interesting comments about their perceptions of the schooling system. Fundamentally they saw schools as something for 'others' — and certainly not for people like them: it was not for people who struggled to succeed in a competitive environment.

Well school, I mean if you're intelligent at school, you're fine, but if you've got a learning disability or if you're slow in any sort of way ... (Hannah)

Yeah, compulsory school, mainstream teaching, it didn't work for me. And it didn't work for a lot of others and I found the same thing at [programme], all the students that I was with had the same problem. Mainstream teaching — either you coped with it or you were put to one side in the too-hard basket. And the ones that were good at mainstream, they went forward, you were pushed to one side and basically forgotten about. (Martin)

Chris, who attended a private school, felt that people like himself were 'written off' by teachers who failed to see and promote their positive attributes.

I feel like they just sort of gave up. I know that sounds mean, but I remember one person saying 'you should leave school and just go and work selling shoes' sort of thing. When you're a 14 year-old you think 'Jeez, they're supposed to be professional people.' And that's one thing I've always thought now I'm never going to say to someone because no matter what you are, you can still achieve something.

Yeah, and you just feel like ... you are trying but it's just so hard. It took me ages to realise that and to think 'Jeez, it wasn't my fault'. It's a private school. You pay lots of money to go to and they treat you like —. Not just me, it happened to a few other people I knew who had the same problem. And you think, 'what are they there for?'

Health issues

In the course of talking about their home and school experiences, a number of the interviewees mentioned health issues that they felt had affected their learning as children. These health issues included hearing difficulties, which caused a number of other problems.

A teacher would walk out of the room, half the class would go bloody stupid. I'd try to sit there, and I had very sensitive hearing, and I'd try to focus on what's on the board, trying to do the work and these arseholes making all the noise, I couldn't concentrate. So I really begrudge the people that I went to school with because they may have not wanted to know, but I did... They robbed me of the opportunity to learn. (Lance)

And of course it's actually affected my ears, I've just had an ear operation. It's been a problem through all my childhood actually. So that has a lot to do with speaking, somehow it's all linked up, speech and hearing and the whole auditory ... I was abused as a kid and that's how I got my ear problem. (Mark)

When I was little I was deaf. I had grommets. It also made my speech sort of weird. (Kelly)

Two others also mentioned speech difficulties.

Well, the only thing I know now that I should have done when I was at primary school was when I was nine. Teachers suggested to me that I should go to a speech therapist and she gave me a note to give to my mother which I threw away. I know that was a mistake. And then again when I was eleven it was also mentioned that I should go to a speech therapist and I never told my mother that I was supposed to ... So yeah, at school I could have taken advice that I chose to. (Barry)

...and pronouncing words 'cause of my accent. That's what was told to me anyway because one time when I came back [from overseas] I was about five and I had to go off to speech classes 'cause the teachers couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand them. (Marilyn)

For some, general poor health certainly affected their school attendance, but also provided a ready excuse to avoid what they detested about school.

Oh my asthma, I'd say that was a big thing 'cause I was hardly, I was away quite a lot and that was again once, being nervous, scared, bullied, didn't want to go [to school], asthma became a big excuse I think and just didn't want to be there. School scared the hell out of me when I was young. (Martin)

I was in and out of it quite a lot 'cause I was sick. I ended up having to go to health camps and that didn't help because it made me miss out on a lot of school. (Lee)

Work

Leaving school with minimal or no qualifications (usually around the age of 15 and often before) inevitably meant that most of the interviewees went into low-paid, manual jobs.

I've been a builder's labourer; I've been a painter. I've been a carpenter. Dairy farmer obviously. I've been a fencing contractor. Like deer fencing and sheep fencing, that sort of thing. What else have I done? Mainly labour, manual labour jobs. Physical. (Jordan)

Although most of their jobs would be officially classified as semi- or unskilled, people like Bob obviously built a broad repertoire of skills in the process.

Mechanical jobs, carpentry type jobs. I can fix and tune motorcars and I can fix and build houses or repair them or put windows in and all that sort of thing. I can also make cabinetry. I've worked as a farmer. I've worked as a landscape gardener. I've worked as a cook. In [town] I worked in the [hotel] as a room service waiter. I've worked in private hospitality. I've worked for [company], making films and movies. Worked on sets.

Helped build sets and fabricate the façade of a movie set. Then after working on the particular job I got a job in the headquarters working as a driver/courier, delivering scripts and payrolls and picking up contracts and delivering them to the artists. Company car — that was a good job.... Those are the main things. I have worked in property development. Bought and sold my own house. Improved its capital value by 100% in six years.

Nonetheless, work for people like Jessica consisted of a series of short-term jobs, most of which were only moderately satisfying.

We took tour groups out. Just mainly taking care of them, mucking out, cleaning the gear. We built fences. Then in '91 I was a [outdoor job]. It was [interesting]. It was quite good. That was out at [company] out there. I was there for two and a half years. Just really maintenance and care of the animals we had. Like llamas we'd muck out the paddocks; we had wood pigeons, keas. We'd clean them out and feed. That's when I ended up on the career-planning course in '93. So that took me right through to the driving course one and then I went to [country] for 10 days and then came back to the driving course. I was [also] a kitchen hand at the [hotel] for a year. I did that once a week. I've help run a karaoke system for three years. Like, I've looked after farms and that sort of thing as well over the years. What else have I done? I've worked in a honey factory in '89 I think it was, putting labels on honey pots for about a week. I've worked at [company] for two months doing transfers. I've cleaned schools, taxi driver.

Leaving school without qualifications and having poor literacy skills meant that Mark's working life was dominated by manual jobs and the type of job he wanted was beyond him prior to attending the literacy course.

When I left [company], I got a job working for [company]. I was just shovelling pigshit there. That's all I amounted too. A farmer took a liking to me, thought I was a hard worker and took me to [rural area]. I spent 10 to 12 years working on the high country station at [a rural area]. Then I did long-haul driving. I did the driving and I did storeman work. Left driving to see if I could get a little bit more academic doing storeman work. [But I] had a lot of nervous breakdowns through there. That's where my employment went downhill. [It was the] pressure of the job, what it was actually requiring of me because I didn't have the skills. It was a lot to do with my education.

There's an old saying, with my children that I have now, I always say that I'm going to make sure that they carry a suitcase, not a shovel. I like office work. I like quiet work. I wouldn't mind working in a nursery.

I loved to work in an office environment. I like working with people I suppose you'd call it customer service 'cause I know I relate well ... [But they discouraged me from that.] I guess they just didn't want to hurt my feelings. I had too high ambitions and I wasn't looking at my limitations. But that made me more determined, more angry towards them

and everyone else. And my life has gone down hill ever since then. Anger management courses. The whole bureaucracy of everything, it just kills ya'. [After I left my job], it went downhill. I've been on temping. I just existed really. I went on a benefit after that. Just did what I was trained to do. Stuck with that on and off. Wasn't' very healthy. Just no stability.

Experiences and difficulties leading to participation in adult literacy programmes

Introduction

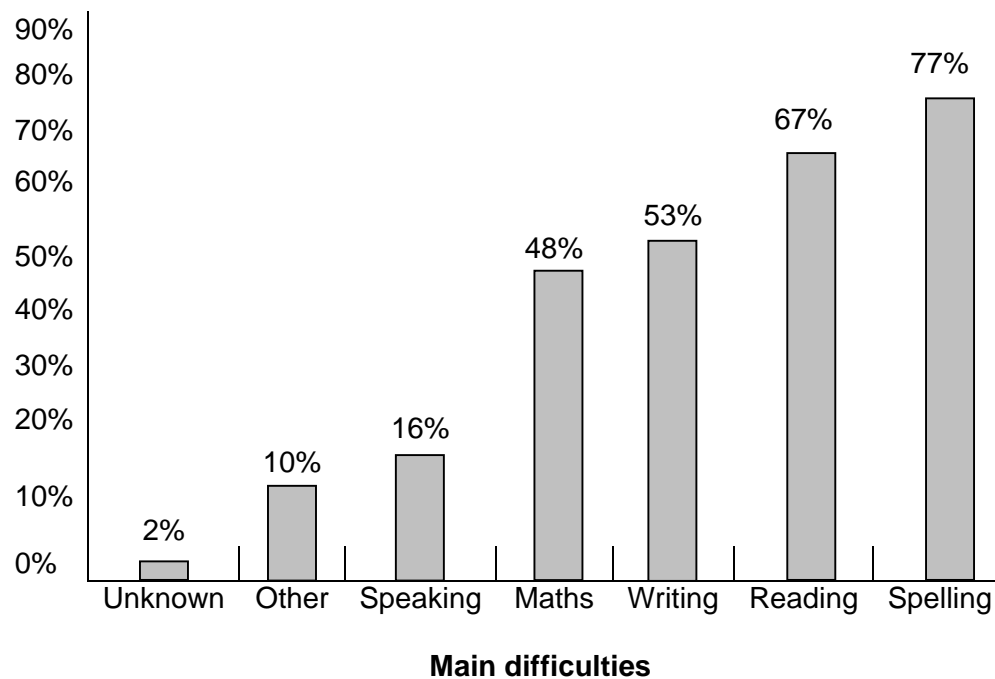
This chapter explores the interviewees' literacy experiences and strategies immediately prior to joining the literacy programme. The first section identifies the main difficulties they were having which led them to join the programme; the second section discusses the strategies they used to deal with these difficulties before joining the programme; and the third presents data on how they first heard about the programme and investigates their reasons for enrolling in the programme. Some of the chapter's data is presented in quantitative terms; however, for the most part it illustrates these issues by using the interviewees' own accounts and identifying themes arising out of these accounts.

Main difficulties before attending programme

Interviewees were asked to identify the main difficulties or problems that had led them to join the literacy programme.

Figure 2 overleaf summarises the difficulties that led participants to join the programme. Although some interviewees identified only one area of difficulty, more commonly they said that they had experienced difficulties in several areas.

Figure 2 – Main difficulties/problems before joining the programme



Sixty-four people (77% of those interviewed) identified spelling as one of the main problems, which had led them to join the programme, 56 (67%) identified reading difficulties, and 44 (53%) identified writing difficulties. Spelling and reading were thus the most frequently identified main difficulties. However writing difficulties were often associated with spelling difficulties. In addition, 40 (48%) identified maths difficulties, and 13 (16%) identified difficulties relating to confidence and ability in speaking out or giving an opinion in a group situation or in English. These difficulties took various forms and affected people in various ways.

Reading, writing and spelling

A number of interviewees talked about their reading, writing and spelling difficulties. However they described these difficulties in many different ways and had many different understandings and interpretations of them. Some also talked about the prejudices that they, and others, faced on a daily basis arising out of their literacy difficulties.

Thomas said that his main problem had been his:

reading, spelling and knowing how the words formulate like the phonetics, the vowels, the verbs, how they're constructed, how they break, and how to slow down my brain at the time.

He said that he had fractured his skull when he was six months old and that he had dyslexia, which had been “caused by the head injury.” He then went on to describe some of the ways in which people who cannot read are seen by many others in society and some of the prejudices they face on a daily basis.

A person with a reading problem is perceived to be retarded when they're not retarded in some cases. You get that all the time. You keep getting pushed back. You don't get ahead. They keep saying 'Oh no, we don't think you can do this job'.... And it sort of pushes people back, they look at a person from the point of view that [they have] got to be dumb. Because he can't read he must be unintelligent. A lot of people judge another person's intelligence by how much they can read or by what their qualifications are etc. — they love to stereotype in that category.... That is one major problem which society has to get over, their general attitudes toward individuals with reading, writing and spelling problems.

Jane felt that at the time her main difficulties were in reading and spelling and she wanted to improve her vocabulary.

I wasn't interested in maths or writing. And understanding the words, do you know what I mean? When you say them, people can say big words to me, and I don't quite understand them.

As far as reading was concerned, Jane said

I could read pretty good, I could read to get by, but when it came to spelling the words, I had difficulty, like when it was writing kids' notes for school, things like that.... I wanted to learn to spell better, well spelling [and writing] really go hand in hand don't they? Well, I can write notes, but some of the words I had - like, I'd miss out letters on them. I'd get it near enough, but yeah, that's one of the reasons why I went there, because I really thought, 'Wow, I'm going to come out a brain box, you know'. That's what I was led to believe.

Jordan felt that reading was his biggest problem, though he recognised that he needed help in other literacy areas as well. His reading difficulties had given rise to many difficulties in connection with his work. He referred specifically to the difficulties involved in signing contracts. “Reading contracts was a big thing,” he said. He would generally find an excuse to take them home and then

get his mother or partner to read them to him and “all I'd do is sign them.” However there were times when this was not possible:

When they needed an answer there and then, and I'd sign the contract not knowing what was in it ... I'd get myself into a bit of a sticky spot in regards to times and days off and that sort of thing. I'd just turn up every day and the boss would be, like, well ‘what are you doing here?’ and I was like, ‘Oh I thought I had to work.’ And he goes, ‘Well it's in your contract that you have x amount of days on, x amount of days off.’

An inability to read could lead to embarrassments as well as disasters. Jordan's most disastrous and embarrassing moment had been at work. He said that he was a dairy farmer and was working on a dairy farm at the time of the incident:

Because I couldn't read I couldn't read labels on chemicals and I was washing the milking plant out one day and I put the wrong chemical through the plant and the farmer had to tip two and a half thousand litres of milk out.

This incident led directly to Jordan's recognition that he should do something about his reading by joining the literacy programme.

At the time that Lee enrolled for the course she had problems spelling and reading. However she felt that her biggest problem was her lack of confidence. She would sign documents without being able to read them.

I'd just sign it 'cause I couldn't understand what it was. You know, any of the big words, I just couldn't understand it. And I was too embarrassed to ask because in the past I always got hassled about it. That was a big issue. I wouldn't do much because I couldn't read very well. My kids never learnt to read very well because I couldn't read to them very well. I think if I'd learnt how to read a bit better, they would have been a bit better. [Also] I just basically didn't have confidence to talk in front of people. My social skills were probably zero. I'd go to places and not talk unless someone talked to me. It was just basically confidence — lacking in confidence mainly.

Deborah said that spelling, along with writing, were her biggest difficulties, and that she had been diagnosed with dyspraxia. For her this meant,

[Difficulty] getting the letters in the right order and actually hearing the letters. I get mixed up before they come out.

They go in one way and come out a different way ... [If I were to see a word and then try to write it down] I wouldn't be able to remember unless I looked at it and tried to remember it, but in a few days it would be gone. But hearing words, I can't hear the sounds in some of the letters. Other people can hear them, but I can't.

Eric identified reading, spelling and maths difficulties. He said that he found it really frightening to have to confront the fact of “not being able to read very well, and not being able to work out numbers very quickly either.” This had a direct affect on his job performance and how co-workers treated him.

If you're in a job where you have to pack a certain a product and you have got to keep count of that and of the actual cartons going past you and the individual items inside the cartons as well, that can become a problem. Also if you've got to write what product is inside of the carton on top of the carton that can be a problem as well. And if you do spell things wrong or if you do calculate things wrong, there's always somebody around to point it out ... and they don't always point those things out in a nice way either. Sometimes it can depend on who you're working with...

The thing is, after a while, if that continues to happen day after day, it can get on top of you to the point where you really don't want to go to work because you know if you get put on a job where you do have to keep count of things or write on cartons, and you know that you're going to make a mistake eventually and you aren't as fast at calculating things as your working peers — and these days everything goes on speed and your peers can pump out things a lot faster — it can get you down after a while.

Did that result in you having to leave a job?

No, I just thought, 'I'll take my time, and if you don't like it at the end of the day, well that's just too bad.' But you do think about it before you go to work and you do think about it on the drive home, and you do think about it on your days off, and it does build up after a while. And it can bring you down.

Marie had multiple difficulties. She traced many of them back to her school years. She was teased and tormented at school for being a slow learner and as a consequence, she says that as an adult she was “very much just a loner.”

I had my daughter but I just kept to myself. I was never used to friendships or anything because of school. You can't miss something you've never experienced. The school diagnosed me six months before leaving school that I was dyslexic, but they said they didn't know if they could teach me as a person suffering from dyslexia you see. I wasn't stupid or anything. There wasn't the teaching available for that. That's where [programme] helped me a lot. They were teaching for what my problem was. It got too frustrating having to look up every word in the dictionary. I couldn't write letters. I had to ring people. I could read a bit, but it got too frustrating having to look up every word in the dictionary. I had problems remembering them because of the dyslexia and that.

Jimmy, whose home language is Samoan, had struggled with aspects of English and in particular grammar and pronunciation. Some people had laughed at him because of this difficulty.

I can tell the way they look at me that they're laughing, the way that they smile. But I just don't mind, it's not my language, you can correct me.

He also said that it had affected his ability to communicate.

Sometimes I had to correct it before I even say it. Like I had to translate from Samoan to English before I said it, or sometimes I don't say anything at all.

Sheryl struggled with her reading and writing for many years. "I just didn't do anything about it. I lived my life knowing that I couldn't read or write." She mentions that she couldn't even read her own letters. When letters came in, "I just wouldn't open them because I knew I wouldn't be able to read them," she said. She could not read the newspaper or read at work.

Also it was embarrassing when my little nieces and nephews would ask me to read them a book, I would just pretend that I didn't hear them.

She said that her main difficulty was "probably that I really didn't understand. I can spell but probably put letters back to front." As a consequence she struggled with reading and writing.

John said that he had a number of difficulties including reading spelling, writing and maths. Moreover he had a speech difficulty as well. He said, for example, "it was quite hard to fill out forms, like at the bank, job agencies or through WINZ." He also said that his job involved stocktaking, and working with numbers was

therefore very important. He talked of constantly “double-checking, ‘cause I was getting paranoid that I would do it wrong.”

Terry had a long history of literacy difficulties dating back to his childhood. He had attended programmes in the past to help him, and one programme in particular had helped him enormously. In spite of this, when he joined the adult literacy programme he still had difficulties with reading, spelling and writing.

I've lived with an eye/mind communication problem with — some people call it dyslexia. I don't know, it's not an in-vogue comment these days. People would more like to say, neuro-transmission problem or something.

He felt that it had a big impact on his life, including limiting the range of jobs he could apply for as well as his possibilities of promotion.

I could never get myself past the Head Cook because I didn't have the administration abilities. I could never get passed just being the cook, or the mechanic on the side. But, I've been bold enough to have my own business and I employed a secretary to do the work.

Eric's primary problems were in reading and spelling. However, this affected his writing, and he also struggled with maths. He described some of the ways in which these difficulties affected his friendships and social life.

When I was younger and you're playing games like *Pictionary* and things like that or *Scrabble*, well you just can't play. And if you go around to friends' places who you don't really know and they invite other people around and they say 'Let's play *Pictionary*', you just think 'Oh my god, how am I going to do this?' So usually you just say 'Oh look, I'm not interested; I'll just read a book' and make the cups of coffee.

There are ways around things but it doesn't make you very happy inside when you see your peers doing things really easily and you just can't join in because at the end of the day you know you're going to make a complete fool out of yourself if you make a mistake especially around people you don't know very well.

So you tend to sit back and have a cup of coffee, and laugh when they laugh and get excited when they do. There are ways around it. But at the end of the day, it doesn't make you feel any better because you don't feel part of things. I

suppose that did affect me along the way especially when I was younger. But now it's fine.

Mathematics

As we shall see below, the desire to improve their abilities in mathematics was one of the reasons given by several interviewees for their enrolment in the literacy programme.

A few went further to talk about their difficulties and experiences of mathematics prior to their enrolment in the programme.

Martin said he “always became very, very nervous, and freaked right out and shut right down” trying to do maths and these difficulties had a big impact on his job.

[I] used to lay asphalt and I needed to be able to figure out quantities, depths, square areas and all that sort of thing, and even just getting it down on paper was so hard. And I could not go forward past being a labourer so I decided, ‘Right, I want to get further than that’. And when I was made redundant [I got] the opportunity to do something about it.

Jimmy said that mathematical difficulties had been the main ones that had led him to join the programme. “I'm not really good with percentages and working decimals and stuff like that.” He said that his job had required him to work with decimals and percentages and he “would really struggle to do it.” He also felt that his limitations in mathematics had prevented him from studying to become an electrician, and had blocked other job possibilities.

Tamara enrolled for the literacy course with the very specific aim of improving her maths. Her main motivation was to be able to study horticulture at university. She had no difficulties with other aspects of literacy. She had done English to university level and had tutored English at the Polytechnic. She had however missed out on maths at school and in spite of her father's encouragement over the years, she had never gone back to study maths.

I thought that I had a disability [in maths] but as time went on and they assessed me, it was just that I hadn't been taught. I just needed to be taught that bit that I had missed in Standard Four and I was away.

Speech difficulties

A number of interviewees also talked about their speech difficulties. Barry said that his speech difficulty made it hard

I have, well I don't know what you'd call it, but I wasn't able to pronounce some words correctly so I - one of the tutors said I have what she called a lazy tongue. I slur my S's and don't say some words properly. She hadn't suggested it but someone else had suggested that I should have gone to a speech therapist.

Mark saw his biggest challenge as having the confidence and ability to speak, and to speak out. Early in the interview he said "speaking's been a real big problem" and he went on to ask this of the interviewer.

Do I sound all right now?... speaking's [always] been a bit of a mission. It's taken a lot of hard work really, through speech therapy. Something that I'd like to improve on even more really.

He had had hearing difficulties and speech problems as a child and they had continued into adulthood. Among other things, his ears had been damaged by the abuse. He had been "a very, very quiet little boy" and he still found it 'really hard. "It's affected my whole life because I haven't really had any steady employment ever," he said. When asked how he had coped with all this, he said,

[I] used to get angry, used to get frustrated. Or just closed off. Never thought I would amount to anything and just left it alone.

Diane said that she had dyslexia quite severely." She had struggled with this since she was young. Her mother had decided to home-school her and had tried everything to help her. As a consequence, things had improved a little. The dyslexia had given rise to many difficulties. "I used to get words all muddled up and run the wrong way and stuff [and] ... I was spelling things backwards." She also said that speaking had been a problem.

My speech wasn't good; it wouldn't come out very clearly. It took me so long to think of what to say and how to put it and stuff.

Strategies used to deal with difficulties

Interviewees were asked to identify the strategies or ways in which they had coped with their literacy difficulties before enrolling on the course. Jane was one of those who looked for ways to communicate without exposing her limited vocabulary and spelling.

Instead of using big words you use little words. Can you understand what I mean? You just use little words, and if I'm not too sure then I re-write it so it's got the simpler words in it.

Coping with reading, writing and spelling difficulties is an issue that can take a great deal of energy, but coping with prejudice is an entirely different matter.

You get to that stage where you go into yourself and you don't want to be part of society because of society's actual attitude toward you get depressed. I was getting depressed about it because I was trying to tell people at the time that I was as normal as the next person ... [Many government officials are] really negative types of people. And the moment you say you've got a reading problem, they write you off,. In other words, they don't want to know you. And society has a tendency of writing people off easily. I used to keep to myself 99% of the time except for the people I was working with at the time.... But 99% of the time, you don't like to tell people you've got a reading problem. You sort of shut yourself away like a hermit. You don't want to associate with people because of the overall attitude that people have in general. You don't want to have to deal with it, to have to explain things. I used to get tired of having to explain things to people...' (Thomas)

Jane also said that she used to be quite skilled at disguising her difficulties.

I was all right, yeah. I managed, you'd be surprised at people who have a problem with that, disguise it very, very well. I mean I reckon they're a lot more clever than the people that can read and spell because they've hidden it from people for years.

Barry would take any letters he received to his mother for her to read to him. On the other hand, he said that because he could not read very well he had learned to memorise things and places. "Like if you can't read [a street sign or consult a map for example] I think your memory must improve."

Emma avoided reading as much as possible. When asked how she dealt with bills in the mail and that sort of thing, she replied, "I'm so bad I usually just open them up and like throw them away 'cause it's just a real hassle reading." Her son who is nine and a good reader, helps her.

Tony, who had struggled with spelling and reading and writing, said,

I tried to avoid anywhere I had to go where I had to fill out forms, yeah any sort of reading and writing. The type of job that I was actually going for was mainly physical labouring type jobs, cause I didn't have the confidence to read. Any type of job, yeah. And you just got good at hiding it there for a while. Most of it was avoiding techniques, yeah just avoiding different things and a lot of the time if I was writing out labels or something for like a machine I'd take key words home and actually have a little notebook with all the words that I'd need to use on that particular job, do it that way.

Because of Bob's reading, writing and spelling difficulties, he used other media for which reading was not needed.

I got all my information from the telly, radio that sort of thing ...I couldn't be bothered reading. I really had no reason to read, so the first time I got my driver's licence test, it was a mission and a half, I couldn't read at all, basically so it took me a while to get it.

Ellie never learned to read and write, and she had difficulty studying for her driver's licence and reading to her children. She also had difficulty filling out forms and other official documents as well as employment applications. She tried to cope with some of these difficulties by asking for permission to take the forms home and then getting help in completing them. However she was not always successful. As far as new jobs were concerned, she talked of one strategy she had used to avoid exposing her inability to read and write by working for a week on no wages.

I'd go to them and say, "Look, if you let me work with youse for a whole week — I don't want any wages — I can prove to you that I'm a good worker." And that's how I got a lot of jobs that I got by working with them for a week, no wages. Because I couldn't read or write, that's the only way that I could do it.

Melinda's main difficulty was with spelling.

My difficulties were my spelling and sort of getting words mixed up. I used to think, "Oh, I am really stupid, I can't do things.

She went on to describe some of her coping strategies.

I tried to avoid any place where I would have to spell, and if I did have to go, like a bank or something, I'd sometimes bandage my hand so they could fill it out. You know there are always those little tricks that you use ... I might make some excuse about, "Could you tell me what that sign says 'cause I'm blind in one eye?" I would often say, "Oh I can't, it's a bit fuzzy, I can't read it" or something. I would make some excuse, I would find a way to get around it if I had to but I tried not to. I would ask my family a lot and sometimes family and friends that knew me, that I was close to ... I would ask them how to spell things, but sometimes I felt like they got sick of that so sometimes I just wouldn't do it.

Dennis said that he was "completely illiterate" at the time that he joined the literacy programme. He elaborated by saying that he could not read signs, bumper stickers and menus. He coped with this by avoiding as far as possible those situations that required him to read. Instead of trying to read the menu at a restaurant he would order the same thing every time. He also said that he had learned to memorise things. For example when he prepared for the test for his driver's licence he said that he "had to memorise all fifty questions and answers."

Nicole recalls a number of difficulties including reading, spelling and writing, which had led her to join the programme. She said that she had difficulty communicating with people and difficulties with reading in general. Her reading difficulties had become particularly apparent on a previous course she had taken which had required "quite a lot of reading." On the other hand she said, "I had people who could help me, and my parents were quite good," and she also recalled a tutor on the course she had been on before joining the literacy course, who had been "really good to her." It was this tutor who had referred her to the programme.

Richards' reading, writing and spelling difficulties had caused him problems in many everyday things including filling in forms and taking notes as well as in his life more generally. He had coped with his difficulties by using ingenuity to disguise his limitations and by avoiding situations that required writing and spelling.

He was very critical of the way in which "the system treated so many young people" and failed to provide them with the help they needed. He described the embarrassment faced by many who struggled with literacy difficulties.

I can pick a person, if they're at an office or a counter, I can tell by their body language if they have problems with writing. They're nervous. You can see their face, they're

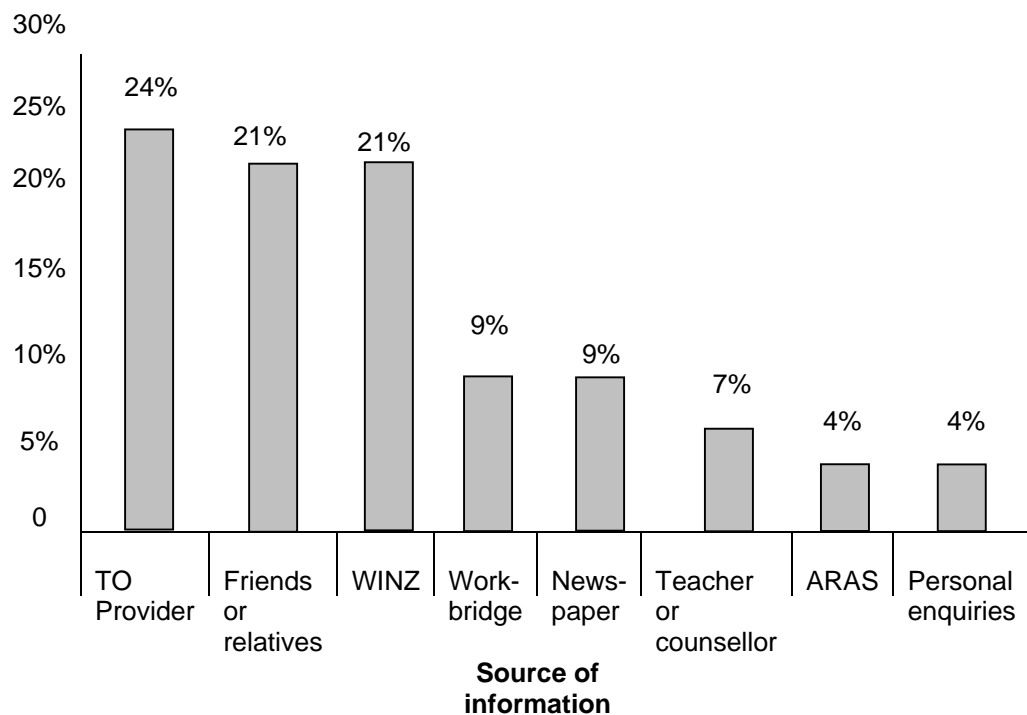
flushed. It's a terrible sensation that comes over you. You walk, you're talking away and then they produce a piece of paper. The fear is indescribable. I think it's worse than being in combat. The fear and embarrassment of 'Oh Jesus, what do I do here?' It's very depleting. It takes layers off you every time. You're off and ... and you're going on with life, and you have to do something with the written word. Bang, you're knocked back another ten places, so you've got to be very resilient. The system and the way society is and life, you just have to keep plodding on. A lot of people give up, of course.

Reasons for participation

Interviewees were asked, firstly, how they had initially heard of the literacy programme, and secondly, what had made them decide to enrol.

Figure 3 summarises the responses to the first question.

Figure 3 – How interviewees first heard about the literacy course (n=70)



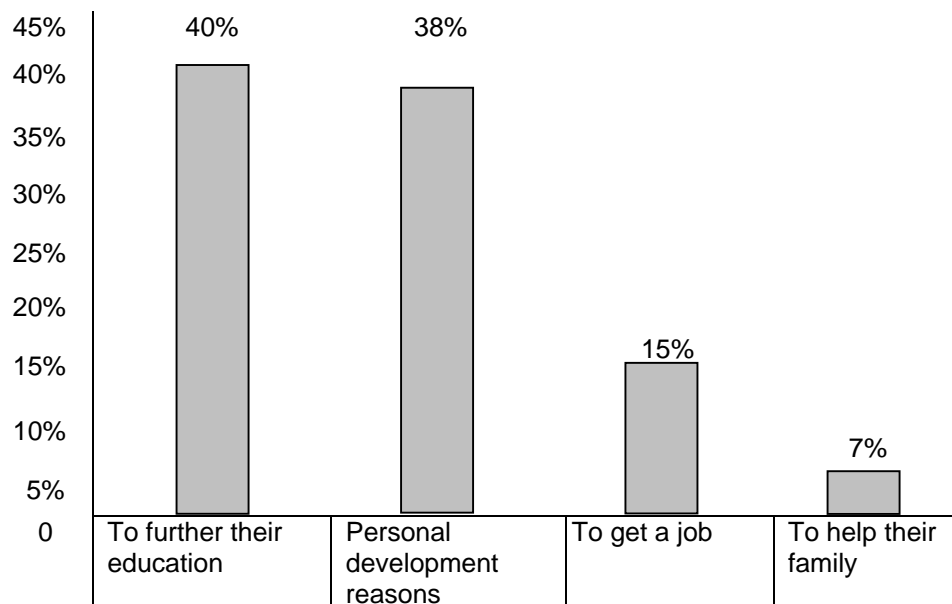
Twenty-four percent of those who responded to this question had been attending another Training Opportunities programme and had first heard about the literacy course from another TO provider. A further 21% first heard about the course from WINZ

and 9% from Workbridge. Overall, more than half (54%) of interviewees had been referred to the programme by official sources or TO providers, whereas 46% had heard about the course either from public sources such as newspapers (9%) or from informal sources including friends and relatives and personal enquiries.

Secondly, interviewees were asked what had made them decide to go on the course.

If they did not respond they were given a number of prompts. The responses to this question are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Respondents’ stated reasons for participation



To further their education

Forty percent of the reasons given by the interviewees for joining the programme were about wanting to ‘further their education.’

Ewan and Jane had both been referred to the course by WINZ. Ewan said that his reason for enrolling was “to get an education really, ‘cause I didn’t have very much education when I went to school [30 years ago]. So I thought I’d give it a go”. And Jane saw it as a chance “to further my education as far as reading and spelling ... I was led to believe that when I left that I would be great. So I thought, ‘Wow, this is a chance for me to change my whole life around”.

Barry said he joined the literacy programme because

I wanted to see if I could get School Cert English and Maths and I thought I needed to improve my reading and spelling some before I try it.

Patricia looked to the literacy programme to help her to achieve her personal pursuit of knowledge. She said that the more she read, the more she wanted to know and she found it even more frustrating as she realised her limitations and “how much more there was to learn.” Hence it was her personal desire “simply to know more” that drove her to join the literacy programme.

Melinda said that her main reason for enrolling was to achieve her personal and vocational goals, to qualify as a midwife, to prove that she could do something and make something of her life and to become a more confident person. Kim, who had heard about the literacy course from a friend who had attended it, joined the literacy programme for general educational reasons. She enrolled mainly to improve her “written English, and probably just a little bit of spelling as well, and just a little bit of reading.” She knew her reading was,

Roughly OK, but I knew I wanted to improve because I found sometimes reading a book quite hard, cause I'd get up to a word and I didn't know what it was.

Colin heard about the course through the newspaper and said that he saw it as a chance to “brush up on his skills.” He said that his main difficulty before joining the literacy programme was with spelling which had led on to writing difficulties. This had affected his schooling and his work as well as his everyday life.

Emma was referred to the course by a polytechnic tutor. She saw it as an opportunity to improve her education. She said, “It was probably the right time in my life [to do it] ‘cause my son was three and I was probably wanting to do something about it.” Tamara, who had been referred to the programme from ARAS, enrolled for the course with the very specific aim of improving her mathematics.

Basically I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't been told that if I wanted to study horticulture at university you had to take sixth form maths. So that was my original reason.

Personal development reasons

Thirty-eight percent of the reasons given for enrolling in the programme were related to interviewees' personal development.

Jordan was inspired to enrol for the course by a friend who had succeeded on it. This “enthused me to sort my life out.”

Doug and Janice both heard of the course through WINZ. Doug described the way in which he had decided to join the course.

When I was filling in forms I used to bring them home and my wife used to do them. It got to the point where one day a form had to be filled in then and there, and I couldn't do it. I thought, ‘Well it's time to do something about it’. It was personal really.

When asked for her reasons for enrolling Janice said,

It was to do with just trying to help me out with — so I could get a wee bit further, like filling out forms and things and to do with getting a job.

Richard said that he had joined the literacy programme because he had come to the realisation that he “wasn’t getting anywhere” and that he “needed to do something about it.” It was for his own personal development.

Jeff said that spelling and mathematics were his main difficulties when he joined the literacy programme. He had enrolled for the course mainly for personal development reasons. He also referred extensively to his speech disability or impediment.

Job-related reasons

Fifteen percent of the reasons given for joining the programme were directly job-related.

Eric, who had been referred to the programme by WINZ, said that he found it really frightening to have to confront the fact of “not being able to read very well, and not being able to work out numbers very quickly either.” However he felt that he had to go on the course to satisfy “the employment agency.”

Martin first heard about the programme when Workbridge referred him to it. His reasons for joining the programme were mixed. They included curiosity and the desire simply to understand more. However the precipitating reason for his participation was work-related.

I was made redundant and I had to do something. I couldn't sit around and do nothing. I wanted to upskill and I went to them ... Workbridge gave me an introductory letter to go and see them cause I was interested in computers and

stuff like that — I was sort of intrigued on knowing how they worked.

Ben first heard of the course through the newspaper. He wanted to get into the army and felt that improving his reading and writing would strengthen his application.

Ruth was referred to the programme by WINZ. Her main difficulties were with reading, spelling and writing — “I couldn’t read at all, so it made it difficult to go for jobs.” She had difficulty filling in forms and reading instruction manuals and said she coped by “kind of bluffing my way through a lot of things.” Her main reason for joining the literacy programme was to help her to find a job.

Family-related reasons

Seven percent of the reasons given by interviewees for joining the programme were family-related.

Marie heard about the programme from her caseworker at WINZ. She thought that the course would enable her to help her daughter.

My little girl [was the main reason] .. I knew when she got a bit older she would need help with her homework and thing ... I wanted to be able to do things better for her... I wanted to do something about it before she started school.

Noel first heard about the course through a newspaper advertisement. His main reason for enrolling was also related to his children.

I’ve got young children, and I basically wanted to help them with their spelling and bits and pieces instead of having their mum do it all the time.

Rosalie said that the thing that made her enrol for the course was her experience with her children.

I was looking after the children and they kept giving me books to read, and of course I didn’t know the words and all that, so I thought, ‘Well, I have to do something about it.’

Issues of compulsion or pressure to join the programme

As we have seen, in most cases interviewees said that they had joined the course voluntarily. However in at least two instances interviewees had experienced an element of compulsion.

Tony, who had been referred to the programme by Workbridge, said that he had joined the course not as a matter of choice, but because he had been sent to it by someone at Workbridge. He said, "That's the way I felt at the time, but actually, it worked out for the best."

Eric first heard about the course when he was referred to it by WINZ at a time when he was unemployed. He feels however that he enrolled for it largely by chance.

I didn't know actually what I was walking into at the time. They just told me, "if you want to improve your maths skills and your English skills well then that course was actually there." And at the time I actually wasn't doing anything else, and I felt, 'Well the ... government's asked me to go, actually paying me each week at the time'. So I thought 'Yes, I would go'. But at the time I didn't know what I was walking into. So I don't know at the time if it was for personal gain or not, I just felt I had to actually go.

CHAPTER 6

Participation in the adult literacy programmes

I mean I was twenty-two years old and I couldn't read and write. That had some real bad downer on me 'cause I felt dumb and stupid and a waste of time, but [programme] picked me up and got me moving again. (Jordan)

Introduction

All of the 83 people interviewed for this study attended either the Hagley Community College or the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology between the years of 1996 to 1999. This chapter looks at some of the interviewees' general experiences as participants in those programmes, while the following chapter then reviews the impact that these programmes had specifically on their literacy skills.

Initial contacts

The interviewees had come to the courses at Hagley and CPIT via a variety of routes. Not only did many have long histories of literacy help at school, but also since leaving school. Arriving at the programme was often the culmination of a series of previous educational courses, some of which included explicit literacy components. Irrespective of his previous experience, fronting up to the programmes was not easy for learners like Bob at the outset, although the initial discomfort was far outweighed for him by the benefits in the longer term.

I sort of, went along, the tutor gave me the number, so I rang it up and I got an appointment. I thought 'Oh well, just go along and have a look' and I spoke to the person there and they said there was a big waiting list, so I thought 'Oh well' because I am pretty scared about these sorts of things, you know, I hate change. And they said well there is a bit of a waiting list, but then they rang me up the next day and said 'there's a spot open if you want to come in tomorrow.' So it was sort of, just thrown upon me. It took a few weeks just to get into it. I tried to think of excuses to get out of doing it.

You were a bit reluctant at first?

Oh, terrible. It was something new, I sort of hate change, I like things to stay the same. But yeah, no once you got to know the people it was really good. Probably the best thing I ever did with my life.

Paul went along to his programme, not knowing what to expect and feeling some degree of compulsion to attend.

At the time, I'm not quite sure what it was for, because I didn't know actually what I was walking into at the time. They just told me "if you want to improve your maths skills and your English skills," well then that course was actually there. I was really scared and frightened because I really had to confront the [tutor] of not being able to read very well, not being able to read very well, and not being able to work out numbers very quickly either. So up until then, there had always been ways to actually hide the fact of course, which is quite easy to do after a certain number of years. So I felt I had to go.

Comparison with school

Interviewees were asked to rate their experience of compulsory schooling. Forty-three interviewees, or 69% of the 62 people who responded to this question, rated their overall experience of initial schooling as 'negative' or 'very negative', whereas 10 or 16% rated it 'positive' or 'very positive'. When asked to compare their experience on the literacy programme with their experience of school when they were younger, 88% (of 65 respondents) stated that it was 'better' or 'very much better', 11% said that it was 'about the same', and only one person said that it was worse.

Like most others, Dennis saw the two experiences as "totally different."

Pity that they didn't have the same sort of idea at school. Maybe more kids would actually learn because structurally, it's a lot more stable and you're there to support each other as well. So yeah, it was definitely different. I hated school. Couldn't stand it. But yeah, I'd quite happily spend every day at the course without any problem. And in some cases, I'd come in on the weekend. I'd go there at 8 o'clock in the morning; I wouldn't leave there until 7 o'clock at night. And I'd just sit in the reading room, just read. So yeah, big difference. When I was at school, soon as that bell went off, I was gone. I was out of there 'cause I just hated school.

Chris came to the programme with a clear idea of what he wanted to achieve, so he valued the flexibility of the literacy programme, which meant that they were able to focus specifically on his literacy issues.

It was totally different. Also, I think I was ready as well. I think I knew what I had to do. I had to focus, not saying I wasn't focusing when I was at school. I also think it's a bit different... the tutors there ... they are not so structured so much, it's more ... they understand. I'm not saying all teachers are like that, but some teachers sort of expect ... it's gotta be done this way, it's gotta be done like this, 'why are you so slow?' When I was at school, I felt like that anyway. [The tutors on the programme were] more understanding and knew what you needed for your needs to be met more really. They used to sit down, we used to spend half an hour talking about what happened and how we were feeling, what we're going to work on this week as a group. And you'd share ideas too. So it was like a second family, really. It was really powerful.

Both Martin and Alison found their programmes were tailored to their individual learning needs — something neither had experienced at school.

I wished when I was at school it would have been like it was at [programme]. They listen to you as an individual, not just as a group of thirty children sort of thing. When I was at [programme] there was a group of [number] and you worked as a group together, not so much with the teacher standing over and saying "this is what I've got on the board, I want you to look at that and learn it." These people were ... if you had a problem they would sit there and discuss it and discuss it until you got it. And whichever direction it had to go, being depending on the individual because everybody's different, they're not the same so they treated it that way. (Martin)

I'd say a lot better. Everyone was an equal when you're at [programme] because everybody had one thing that they didn't know how to do and you may have known how to do that one. So like at school, if you weren't up with the play, "see you later." So in that aspect, the teacher sort of helped you out a wee bit and if you didn't understand something they'd explain it a bit more and so they sort of knew your predicament that you were in. So yeah, I'd say a lot better at [programme] than at school. (Alison)

For Ewan the small size of the classes was a welcome change from his experience at school.

I had more opportunities to learn things, not like at school because in school they had about thirty, forty kids and in the class there was only about half a dozen. There was ten pupils in the class so there's be a lot less.

Strengths of the programmes

In addition to the small numbers and individual tailoring of programmes, a range of other attributes was identified as specific strengths of the programmes. Jenny liked the feeling of not being the 'odd one out' in the group because everyone on the course had some form of literacy difficulty, which made for a more supportive and less judgemental environment.

'Cause it's like everyone was roughly the same age and everyone had the same you know, disabilities if you know what I mean, like everyone could learn together. Like you weren't judged against that, whether you can read or write or anything.

Jessica rated the group work positively.

I think working in groups was a good one, sort of everybody sort of worked together and then you could help some others and it gave you that confidence that, oh yeah you've helped them and they might be able to help you in another part, so it sort of makes you open up a little bit more on some of your problems. So yeah, probably group activities would be a main one. I think three of us exactly the same sort of time and if we helped each other out we got through it 'cause everyone had a different sort of angle of things, but if you worked on it yourself it took you twice as long to do it and you'd get bored and sick of it.

Martin also like working in groups, but found one-to-one tuition also valuable to complement it.

I think the one-on-one on tutoring. It certainly helped a lot. The groups also. I think the ability to be able to sit down and speak with the tutors and let them know how you were feeling. That certainly had a lot to do with self-esteem and the learning process. The groups were very friendly and out-going. Able to work together in a tight knit. Swap ideas.

Programme tutors

Positive comments about the programmes almost always included references to tutors working in the programmes. Deborah felt her tutor was the most helpful aspect of the course and talked about her tutor's ability to find a delicate balance between support and challenge.¹⁸

She was there the whole time to boost your confidence. Each time you found something or you thought something might be too difficult, she just kept push, push, push and didn't let me fall, so I didn't lose confidence. She was there because I did the courses through the college. I did School Cert and Sixth Form — English and Maths. She was there to help direct me when I was feeling lost and didn't know where to go.

Martin really valued how his tutor 'went the extra mile' for him, even after he had left the programme.

My tutor [name] who was there who pulled me through, she was my mentor. She was the one that got me through this; I still ring her up if I have a problem. Three years later, she always made time for everybody. She still does, I still see her on the street she'll stop and she'll talk, I'll ring her up, she rings me up if she's got a problem. She'd go out of her way to make sure we got what we needed, even outside of class. At night if you had a problem you'd ring her up, she had no problem with that.

Jordan also found the same tutor to be extremely important in his various crises during his time in the programme.

Yep. She was a very big inspiration on me. I think if it wasn't for her I wouldn't have stayed at [programme]. I had a bit of a rough patch, had an aunty die and my partner became pregnant and like going through all that stress was you know, I thought bugger it you know, I'll just leave and just carry on with what I was doing and um, she pulled me through it. I was — before [programme], I was very heavily involved in a gang and I pulled myself out of that and tried getting myself sorted out, but [tutor] I've got the highest commendation for that lady, I can't say enough about her. She was my guiding angel through that whole series of my life. Pulled me through. Yeah, well she took the time out to actually listen to me as a person, not just as a student and

18 This attribute was a key element in Benseman's (2001) study of effective Training Opportunities teachers.

she did that with all her students. She's a very, very good lady. And I every now and then pop in and see her and see how she's doing, keep contact.

Criticisms

No teacher or programme can match the expectations of all their students all of the time — or even some of the time. There were also a number of criticisms raised about both programmes. Some of the criticisms involved qualities that others saw as strengths. Neither Sheryl nor Martin liked what they saw as an excessively relaxed attitude in their programmes, which meant that there were times where there appeared to be very little active teaching occurring. They described what was not helpful to them.

Being able to sit around and do what you wanted to do.
(Sheryl)

Sitting there and nothing really happening around you. That was like a big grey wall really. (Martin)

Jane was particularly critical of her experiences. Firstly, she found the teaching ill-matched to her different levels of skill; some work presented no challenge at all, while other tasks were beyond her and she felt she went unnoticed in the class and was unable to seek help.

I think the schooling there is — should be completely different. Because it was like “here's a sheet, do it.” And it was baby work. And it was like wow. It was like, you had to mark your own work and it was always the brainy ones that got all the attention. And I know it's a horrible thing to say. It's like if I was to go on a computer and I've never been on a computer before and it was “here, do this”. I sat there for what, an hour — half an hour. “What do I do, how do I turn it off?” “Well, don't you know?” Because a person who's never used anything would never know. And you know, you have to be shown and you've got to go back and go over and over it again. So in the end, when I was in computers I just sat there and just mucked around, I did nothing. I wish I'd learnt more in computers because there's a teacher there, [name]. She's fantastic in computers. And it was like, I went over and over on these games all the time so I didn't really get the help that I wanted. Mind you, other people were there, but other people, some people seem to get it. I'm very shy so I didn't ask for it.

Her strongest criticism centred on her feelings of being neglected ahead of the more capable and 'visible' learners in her group, which was unfortunately, reminiscent of her schooling experiences.

I don't know, they just seemed to have spent all their time with the intelligent ones. It was like it was back at school, hadn't changed. You know? And they had their own little set teachers pet, can you understand what I mean? And yet we were adults. It was like, wow. It was like no different than school, in fact I was disappointed because I really thought that I would have learned a lot more. And I was really disheartened, yeah. And I was also ashamed of being there. Totally ashamed. Because it's like people don't really admit they've got this problem and it's very embarrassing going to a place like that. You gotta live it to know what's it like.

Her comments later in the interview showed what she saw as being 'neglected' was somewhat more complex than what most people would understand by this criticism and reflect a long history of concealing her needs. For even though Jane indicated to the tutor that she was OK, she expected the tutor to notice that she wasn't.

I'd like to know how other people have felt, because I felt like I went there because WINZ sent me there right? But I actually thought that I would come away a better person. Right, I gained confidence. I also never realized how immature and scatty people could be, even the tutors, I just couldn't believe that it was like being at school, the top people got all the work and the people that sat back and the shy people didn't get any help at all so things just haven't changed. And I thought being adult, you know like "Are you all right?" "Yes." I'd say yes, but I wasn't, I'd sit there and go "what do I do, how do I do it?" And then when you asked sometimes you'd feel like you were a dummy. And the sheet of paper they give you, and the homework, the work that I actually got was like a little kid in primary school. It was like, what? Oh, I mean I did learn, but I didn't learn it till the last, well the last quarter yeah. Three quarters all the way through, I didn't learn anything hardly. I'd bring the papers home and I'd hide them from my children cause it was like little kids. It was really, really degrading.

And being required to learn some topics did not fit at all with her understanding of being a mature-age learner who was very clear about what she wanted to learn.

But general, I mean the tutors were nice, they probably thought they were doing a great job but I'd like to see things change for other people. You know, if you don't want to learn maths I don't think you should have to learn it. I think we're adults and we know what we want out of life and I think that if a person wants to go there, like there's a lady there and she's clever at maths and that's all she done, she really wanted to learn to read. I know you've probably have reading and that too but I mean maths but I just think to myself no, my age maths means nothing to me. But with the reading and spelling would get me a long way. More so than the maths.

'Non-literacy' aspects of the programmes

Both of the programmes included 'non-literacy' components in the form of classes done in other departments at Hagley and CPIT and within the adult literacy timetable.

The courses included classes offered as part of Hagley's secondary school programme, its community education programme, other CPIT classes and a variety of activities such as brain gym, exercise programmes and outdoor education activities.

Reactions to these activities varied across individuals and from activity to activity. For Dennis for example, the exercise activities were a complete waste of time, but he did value the social activities such as picnics.

When I first started the course, they said that we were going on exercise to the gym and that. That was one of the things that didn't sort of do anything for me and really had it set in my mind that we really weren't going to be doing anything like that, we were just going to be doing the course and reading and all that; there wouldn't be any of that at all. Most of the students didn't want to bother either, I noticed. Only some of them did. So I didn't find that overly important. Everything else, yeah. We all went out on picnics and all that sort of thing but that was as a group that was all the tutors and all of us. It was a different thing again. But going over, doing the sport and that, I didn't find that did me anything.... Most of the time, I did go but didn't really find that it did me any good.

Martin however found the outdoor education activities useful in building group morale and addressing some of the relationship issues within the group.

How would you put it, like they took us out trips and stuff like that, we'd go away abseiling and white water rafting and stuff. It taught you how to cope with other people and their differences and just be a team, work together and have a great time really. Yeah, there was a lot of things. Very positive. We found out that you know, go with the positive, forget negative, 'cause negative doesn't work. We all discussed [things] as a group. Something would happen to someone and we'd go, "Well righto, let's discuss this, let's talk about this. Is it good or is it bad and how are you coping with it? And they'd go ... "Oh, hate this person". Hating someone is just negative and it doesn't work and you'd talk to each other about it and it, yeah come out of it at the end of the day feeling a lot better. It works.

Marilyn said that she and others on her programme also enjoyed these activities for helping build their self-confidence.

I just know when I've spoken to other people because they sort of thought that it's set up like a class thing, like you do spelling, reading and that but you certainly do a lot of other activities too. We also went on a camp and we had the privileges of doing things that, especially with some because of their background financially like abseiling, things like that. And that's what I mean about the whole confidence thing, because I had a fear of heights and there's no way I would've done certain things at one stage.

But it was a real team spirit with other people that you'd think you probably wouldn't say hello to down the street, but you'd really work as a group and just the background and variety of people you'd come across.

Patricia enjoyed a woodwork course not only because of the activity itself, but also because it provided a practical context to learn numeracy skills.

For me I really enjoyed the woodwork. It gave me a great idea on the new measurements because that's something I'd never really learnt with centimetres and millimetres, I'd always been a feet and inches person. 'Cause the teacher there is absolutely brilliant and it gave me some – 'cause I've always been into doing things with my hands and that was absolutely brilliant. It was amazing.

The 'brain gym' programme certainly received a mixed reception — though people tended to be enthusiastic for it,

Well I found brain gym to be extremely helpful. Co-ordinated, just doing things where before I wasn't very co-ordinated. Yeah we had one period where we went to brain gym. Oh and she was absolutely fantastic, it made you think different, made you think outside the square and that you weren't silly, that you were a person, an individual. (Ann)

I will mention the whole brain learning they got us to do was actually wonderful for me. Because I had so much trouble with trying to balance things and feeling sick and [tutor] the whole brain learning tutor put extra time in and gave me extra help and she was amazing. Which made a big difference to me cause I couldn't juggle and I'd go to one step and my brain would swim and she explained things to us and she was one very clever lady ... and they taught you how to juggle and how to work things out and a lot of things and she was one of those teachers that nothing was too much trouble. And if you wanted to know something come back with this and she'd explain it to you later and she was absolutely tremendous. (Patricia)

Or enthusiastically opposed to it.

I hated it. (Lani)

And I didn't like brain gym 'cause I thought it was a waste of time. I didn't like doing this and I didn't like doing that, because I basically just wanted to get on with the reading and spelling which I thought was more important than any rubbish really — the old-fashioned way. (Thomas)

Other students on the programme

Other students on the programme are a major element in the mix of factors that affect learning outcomes. Even in a programme where the students apparently have common learning needs, they still vary in terms of their backgrounds, motivations and levels of skill. Many of the interviewees spoke about their fellow-students at considerable length.

Pam enjoyed being among a group of others with whom she felt a lot in common.

See everybody was the same level. You know what I mean? Everybody was the same. There wasn't one person there better than the other ones. We all were on the same level. That's what I enjoyed about it. If we all wanted a word to spell, you know we ask. Everybody was on the same ... I really enjoyed it.

But others like Mark found it difficult to cope with others who he saw as unmotivated:

There were a lot of immature people thinking ... the course was a joke. Some people just didn't take it seriously enough ... wanted to fill in time or to stay on the benefit ... Then there were people like me wanting to get somewhere in life ... who were wanting to learn.

Paul also felt that the age difference between him and the younger participants was a major factor in explaining variations in motivation among the group.

You were crammed in a room with younger people.... The ages run from maybe 16 to 45, even probably 50 years of age. So you've got young people there who've been chucked from classroom to classroom, school to school. And they've probably left school from the age of 16 or 17 and they've bounced from course to course so by the time some of them got to [programme], they weren't interested; they weren't interested at all. So there was a few tantrums going on there. And there was a few people in the classroom who weren't interested in learning. And the thing is - 16 year olds will bitch, you know, and that will get a tad annoying after a while. If I had any suggestions there, I would say that they should age group them like 16s in one class, 20s in another class, and 30s in another, you know? But they actually integrated us all, which I don't think was a great idea. Because if you are in your 30s or your 20s, you'd think, why am I in a class with 16 year olds? That could be classed as prejudice now. But you would find that if you were in your 20s, the 16 year olds a bit pathetic, and then you would wonder 'what am I doing here?' which can interfere with what you're there for in the first place.

Martin observed that changes in the administration of the unemployment benefit by government brought negative changes in the programmes, as an increasing proportion of the trainees were unmotivated and saw the literacy programmes only as a better alternative to working for their benefit.

But as soon as the 'work for the dole' business came along, you got a lot of people coming in which really, really disrupted the whole outfit. Because I went there before that sort of freedom of choice thing and then after the government brought out the 'work for the dole' the waiting list just filled up to the point where they all wanted in. And they just wanted to be there and not have to work for what they were getting which was pretty disruptive, especially for the tutors. They could see it, everyone else could see it, and there was nothing we could do about it. It was very hard. They just didn't want to do anything.

The main complaint against the unmotivated students however was that they disrupted the learning environment for those who were keen to learn. As Martin saw it,

Young students — very disruptive. They were there to muck around and the teachers had problems controlling them because of the way things are now so up to some of us students had to stand up and say "Right-o you people here, stop your mucking around, you're interfering with our learning" and that was the hardest thing to deal with.

Donna also found that her fellow students made her feel quite uncomfortable, but at the same time this feeling had become a motivating force for her own learning goals.

When I walked in on my first day, I thought 'what am I walking into, it's like a zoo.' Because these younger people don't only have learning difficulties, they also have psychological difficulties as well ... Well it was actually meeting other people that put the fear of God into me and I thought, 'I'm not going to end up like that'. That made me get off my butt and start doing things for myself. When I was looking at people they'd say "oh but that's not what I want to do" and I'm at looking people that were 33 and 34 that had never worked and that — and I'm in my forties and I've worked and I thought 'my God, I'm not going to have to end up like that'. It scared me, so it was good. It actually gave me the inspiration to get out there on my own two feet and find myself a full-time job. I went through a temp company, worked my butt off and got offered full-time work.

Other adult literacy programmes

Hagley and CPIT were not the first adult literacy programmes that many had attended. Some had attended programmes over long periods.

And I did something a few years ago but I can't remember what it was. Yeah, when I was about seventeen I suppose. Like I'm thirty-nine now so that was a few years ago. (Tony)

Diane and Patricia have been receiving literacy tuition from private tutors since they left the programmes. Diane has been receiving literacy tuition for the last three years and currently goes once a week to a reading and writing teacher.

I, actually to be honest, this is probably what you won't want to hear, I actually went out and got private tutoring and learnt the things they never picked up on at [programme]. Learnt I'm never going to spell, but I can read and I have a lot of trouble with any words with 'sr' in them, my mind blanks out and that's how I learnt, I got more help, I'm not knocking [programme], it's probably right for some people, but I got more help through [name] and she actually got me on the right track. Picked up things [programme] didn't pick up. Like I was taught at [programme] I didn't have any form of dyslexia, I went to [agency] and they picked up on it. So that made me feel great to find out after all those years I wasn't straight out stupid.

And several interviewees were planning to seek additional help because they still felt frustrated with their skills. Brian said,

Reading is the one that gets to me because I don't know, I sort of get annoyed that like everyone else can do it and it is like 'why can't I type' thing. And I have got lots of friends and family and stuff that you know read magazines like big books and they all sit there and talk about them and "have you read this one?" and you sort of feel as though you are missing something. I actually made some enquiries not long ago. Two weeks ago. I am trying to do some enquiring to see if there, because I live out at [town A], you know by [town B], which is the closest big township to us, so I am trying to find out if there is one there because it is like a 45 minute drive for me to get into town you see so yeah.

Length of programmes

Interviewees were asked how long it had taken on the programme before they had begun to feel that they were making progress. Of the 62 people who responded to this question, 38 or 61% felt that they were making progress in the first three months, others took very much longer with 15% taking 8 months or longer before they began to feel that they were making progress. In view of this it is

not surprising that there was a mixture of opinions about how adequate the length of tuition had been.

The least helpful aspects was the fact that you have to roll over, you have to apply for funding either through ACC or WINZ. That's the least, most unhelpful part of it because ... a child takes approximately five years to learn the basics and then basically progress on their own accord. If you have a form of dyslexia...it's going to take extremely a lot longer. (Thomas)

Although Aaron felt that he had made progress with his reading, he still felt that it was "too short."

Yeah 'cause people need more time 'cause well, two [courses] was well ... and I had to go back. But that was how — but I wanted to go back again. But two was the most you could do of that. I was quite gutted so yeah, it needs to be longer eh. It's 'cause they teach you so much, but after that where do you go from there 'cause yeah, they've only taught you little things and well in real life situations there's big, complicated words. I must admit you are better, you're better than whatever you were before you went there.

Donna spoke at some length about how long the course should be.

To me the course is too long because after the first year you're just sort of sitting around bored trying to figure out what to do with yourself. I think the first year is very important, but after that the course is too long. Yeah, the second year was just a joke. I mucked around trying to figure out what to do with my life. In the first year you sort of go in with, the way it's worded to you when you go in that course is actually good, but it's wrong 'cause you go in there believing hey, I'm going to walk out of here reading this novel and that doesn't happen and a lot of people walk out quite discouraged. After a year I just plummeted with discouragement and that happened to a lot of other people too 'cause you had these extra, extra high expectations that just didn't happen for you. Where they should say look, "we can help you learn, we can help you with your reading and spelling. It mightn't be brilliant, but it will be better than what you've got now."

But you sort of go on it thinking that 'hey, I'm going to be able to pick up my favourite book, *War of the Worlds* and

read it or something', you know? A movie I've really enjoyed, but that doesn't happen and I think that's what I think makes a lot of people sort of switch off after a long time. And you think oh well, I may as well go to school, it's better than sitting at home which is quite sad when there could be someone else there when you look at it, you've actually robbed someone else of the chance that could make some better difference in their life. And I know everyone should be treated the same, but it doesn't always happen out there. And the trouble is, you've got a lot of people that go on that course, not for the fact they want to improve but for the fact it's two years — "I won't have to worry about the benefit on my back and what course can I do after this?" which is quite sad. There should be a limit on the courses. I think a year is enough if people really want to. I think a year's enough to get kicked and get started and know where you're going.

Jordan was one student who made considerable progress in his literacy skills, but he could still see that he could have kept on progressing if he had been allowed to stay on.

My time had ended. If I could have stayed there I would have, 'cause apparently from what I heard, like before I went there I couldn't read my own name let alone write it and within the two years of being there I had reached sixth form grade, I've actually got my Sixth Form Certificate. And I had enough unit standards and credits to go through Seventh Form. So if I had of stayed on I would have gone through Seventh Form which would have made me happier.

Leaving the programme

Involvement in the programmes often extended to two years or more and involved considerable highs and lows emotionally for the participants. Moving on from the programme therefore often meant a period of transition into other activities.

Because a lot of people did, they became very, very attached 'cause they knew what it did for them. I know students that went from being in the same position I was in and went to university and they're still there now. And that's great. (Martin)

Success can bring its own problems. Although he acknowledged the irony of his criticism, Harry found the transition back into work difficult because of the success of the programme.

In some ways it was a little too positive? Like after you've done your course you go back into the real world and it's a wee bit different, you know what I mean? I mean like everything is positive and it's geared up to be positive and sometimes they build, like I've seen it, sometimes they build people up that aren't capable if you know what I mean. And then when they actually hit the real world they're sort of, yeah they come down with a thud. That's the only thing that I noticed. I'm not sure to be quite honest [how they could improve on that]. I mean you can't tear people down that are trying but yeah, it's just building people up and basically you build them up for a fall once they're out of that course environment. I honestly wouldn't know how to get around that 'cause you can't like say, you can't do that 'cause you're actually trying to bring people up if you know what I mean. So yeah, that's a hard one.

Overall rating of the programme

In spite of the fact that interviewees' experiences of the programmes varied widely it seems that most rated the programme very highly. Eighty-eight percent in fact gave the programme a positive rating and only one person rated it negatively. In addition, interviewees were asked to rate their overall progress as a result of their participation in the programme. Only 4 or 5% of the 79 interviewees who responded to this question said that they had made little if any progress, while 95% were positive in their assessment of their progress, with nearly half being very positive.

CHAPTER 7

Then and now:

The impact of the literacy programme on literacy skills

Introduction

In this chapter we explore people's perceptions of the impact of the literacy programmes on their skills.

In the first section below we summarise the data on interviewees' perceptions of changes in their reading, writing, spelling, maths and computer skills. The focus of the second section is on perceived changes in the ways interviewees dealt with those aspects of literacy that were the most important or challenging for them when they first enrolled on the programme.

In Chapter Five we identified many of the initial difficulties and experiences of people in their attempts to cope with literacy difficulties. In this chapter the focus is on identifying how people feel about their difficulties now, whether their literacy strategies have changed, and the extent to which they believe that the literacy programme helped them to overcome their problems.

Impact on literacy skills and abilities

In this section we examine people's perceptions relating to their skills and abilities in reading, writing, spelling, maths and use of the computer. Firstly, we present data on some of the participants' perceptions of their previous and current skills and abilities in these areas. We then present summaries of some participants' perceptions of the impact of the literacy programme. Finally, in each learning area we investigate whether there are any age- or gender-related differences in the perceived changes.

In view of the small numbers of interviewees involved it is important to note that the findings regarding the relationship between aspects of literacy learning and gender, age and cultural background cannot be generalised beyond this study.

Impact on reading

Participants were asked to rate their reading ability before attending the programme as well as their ability at the time of the interview. Overall, interviewees' responses may be summarised as follows:

Table 3 - Self-ratings of reading ability before and after programme
(n=64)

Reading skills (Self-rating)	Not very good	OK	Good or Very good
Before the programme	75%	22%	3%
At time of interview	9%	47%	44%

Whereas only 25% of interviewees rated their reading ability before the programme as 'OK', 'Good' or 'Very good', at the time of the interview 91% rated themselves at these levels.

Participants were also asked to rate the amount of change or improvement in their reading over the period on a scale ranging from 'No change at all' to 'a lot'. Of the 63 who responded to this question:

- 13% of interviewees said that there had been 'No change at all'
- 41% said that there had been 'a little' improvement
- 46% said that there had been 'a lot' of improvement.

Overall, these findings show that most interviewees felt that their current reading ability was considerably better than it had been before attending the literacy programme, and that the programme had a significant impact on their reading. Only 9% continued to rate their reading skills as 'not very good', while 13% said that there had been no improvement in their reading ability over the period.

In addition to the overall impact of the programme on people's reading, we investigated whether the programme had a different impact on the reading ability of women and men of various ages as well as participants from Māori and NZ European or Pākehā cultural backgrounds.

On the question of gender and age it seems that there may be some differences.

- Firstly, women were more likely than their male counterparts to report that there had been 'no change' in their reading abilities: 16% of women as compared with 6% of men reported 'no change' in their reading ability.

- Secondly, younger women (under 30) (17%) and older women (40 and over) (22%) in particular were more likely than their male counterparts (7% and 9% respectively) to report that there had been no change.
- Thirdly, when we compare the ages of women and men who identified 'a lot of improvement' in their reading, older women (40 and over) were more likely than younger women (under 30) to identify 'a lot' of improvement (44% as compared with 33%), whereas younger men (under 30) were very much more likely than older men (40 and over) to identify 'a lot' of improvement (64% as compared with 27%).

The data on cultural backgrounds is limited. However it seems that there were few if any differences in the effects of the programme on the reading abilities of participants from Māori as compared with NZ European or Pākehā backgrounds.

Impact on writing

Participants were asked to rate their levels of writing ability before attending the literacy programme as well as their ability at the time of the interview. Interviewees' responses may be summarised as follows:

Table 4 Self-ratings of writing ability before and after programme
(n=62)

Writing skills (Self-rating)	Not very good	OK	Good or Very good
Before the programme	81%	15%	5%
At time of interview	27%	42%	31%

Whereas only 20% of interviewees rated their writing ability before the programme as 'OK', 'Good' or 'Very good', at the time of the interview 73% rated themselves at these levels.

Participants were also asked to rate the amount of change or improvement in their writing ability over the period on a scale ranging from 'no change at all' to 'a lot'. Of the 60 interviewees who responded to this question:

- 16% said that there had been 'No change at all'
- 42% said that there had been 'a little' improvement

- 42% said that there had been 'a lot' of improvement

Overall, these findings show that most interviewees felt that their current writing ability was considerably better than it had been before attending the literacy programme, and that the programme had a significant impact on their writing ability. On the other hand, 27% continued to rate their writing ability very poorly and 10% said that there had been no improvement in their writing ability over the period.

In terms of gender and age, there were no overall differences between women's and men's ratings of changes in their writing ability. Eighty-four percent of women and 83% of men stated that there had been some improvement in their writing ability. However:

- 75% of younger women (under 30) stated that their writing had improved 'a lot', but only about 30% of women 30 and over made this claim
- the proportion of men stating that their writing had improved 'a lot' was more similar across the age-categories, with the highest proportion (55%) among those in their 30s as compared with 36% of men under 30 and 25% of men 40 and over.

Once again the data on cultural backgrounds is limited, and the differences in the effects of the programme on the writing abilities of participants from Māori as compared with NZ European or Pākehā backgrounds were small to non-existent.

Impact on spelling

Participants were asked to rate their levels of spelling ability before attending the literacy programme as well as their ability at the time of the interview. Interviewees' responses may be summarised as follows:

Table 5 Self-ratings of spelling ability before and after programme
(n=63)

Writing skills (Self-rating)	Not very good	OK	Good or Very good
Before the programme	87%	10%	3%
At time of interview	37%	41%	22%

Whereas only 13% of interviewees rated their spelling ability before the programme as 'OK', 'Good' or 'Very good', at the time of the interview 63% rated themselves at these levels.

Participants were also asked to rate the amount of change or improvement in their spelling over the period on a scale ranging from 'no change at all' to 'a lot'. Of the 63 interviewees who responded to this question:

- 14% said that there had been 'No change at all'
- 40% said that there had been 'a little' improvement
- 46% said that there had been 'a lot' of improvement.

Overall, these findings suggest that most interviewees felt that their current spelling ability was considerably better than it had been before attending the literacy programme, and that the programme had a significant impact on their ability to spell. On the other hand, 37% continued to rate their spelling as 'not very good' and 14% said that there had been no improvement in their spelling over the period.

In terms of gender and age:

- younger people (under 30) reported more improvements in spelling ability than their older (30 & over) counterparts
- the pattern of change among younger people (under 30) was similar, with no-one reporting 'no change' and with similar proportions (about 50%) reporting 'a little' and a lot' of improvement in their spelling
- among women and men 30 and over there was also little difference in the proportions of interviewees reporting no change in their spelling abilities with 24% of women and 22% of men rating themselves in this way

- on the other hand, a larger proportion of men (39%) than women (29%) who were 30 and over reported that their spelling ability had improved 'a lot'.

Once again the data on cultural backgrounds is limited, and the differences in the effects of the programme on the spelling abilities of participants from Māori as compared with NZ European or Pākehā backgrounds were small to non-existent.

Impact on mathematics

Participants were asked to rate their levels of mathematics ('maths') ability before attending the literacy programme as well as their ability at the time of the interview. Interviewees' responses may be summarised as follows:

Table 6 Self-ratings of maths ability before and after programme
(n=64)

Maths skills (Self-rating)	Not very good	Okay	Good or Very good
Before the programme	55%	19%	27%
At time of interview	16%	25%	59%

Whereas 46% rated their maths ability before the programme as 'OK', 'Good' or 'Very good', at the time of the interview 84% rated themselves at these levels.

Participants were also asked to rate the amount of change or improvement in their maths over the period on a scale ranging from 'no change at all' to 'a lot'. Of the 64 interviewees who responded to this question:

- 32% said that there had been 'No change at all'
- 33% said that there had been 'a little' improvement
- 35% said that there had been 'a lot' of improvement.

Overall, these findings suggest that most interviewees felt that their current maths ability was better than it had been before attending the literacy programme, and that the programme had a significant impact on their this ability. On the other hand 16% continued to rate their maths as 'not very good' and 32% said that there had been no improvement in their maths over the period.

In terms of gender and age:

- overall, a higher proportion of men than women reported improvements in their maths ability over the period with 74% of men compared with 52% of women reporting at least 'a little' improvement. Moreover 43% of men compared with 23% of women reported 'a lot' of improvement
- secondly, a higher proportion of younger people (under 30) (52%) as compared with older people (40 and over) (27%) reported 'a lot' of improvement in their maths abilities over the period
- thirdly, when the impact of gender and age are examined together, a somewhat more complex picture emerges. The pattern of self-rated improvements in maths among women and men 40 and older are very similar, with 63% of both women and men reporting at least 'some' improvement
- among those under 30, the pattern of self-rated change is relatively similar for women and men, with 88% of women and 93% of men seeing themselves as having improved their maths skills to some extent at least
- among those in their 30s, however the pattern of change was very different, with 29% of women, as compared with 64% of men reporting at least 'some improvement'.

Once again the differences in maths gains by Māori compared with NZ European/Pākehā backgrounds were small to non-existent.

Impact on computer skills

Participants were asked to rate their levels of computer skills before attending the literacy programme as well as their ability at the time of the interview. Interviewees' responses may be summarised as follows:

Table 7 - Self-ratings of computer skills before and after programme (n=62)

Computer skills (Self-rating)	Not very good	Okay	Good or Very good
Before the programme	94%	0%	6%
At time of interview	34%	21%	44%

Whereas 6% of interviewees rated their computer skills before the programme as 'OK', 'Good' or 'Very good', at the time of the interview 65% rated themselves at these levels.

Participants were also asked to rate the amount of change or improvement in their computer skills over the period on a scale ranging from 'no change at all' to 'a lot'. Of the 59 interviewees who responded to this question:

- 19% said that there had been 'No change at all'
- 22% said that there had been 'a little' improvement
- 59% said that there had been 'a lot' of improvement.

Overall, these findings point to the fact that many of the interviewees had had little experience or knowledge of computers before joining the course and that their response to the use of computers on the course varied widely. The responses suggest that many interviewees felt that their current computer skills were greater than they had been before attending the literacy programme, and that the programme had a significant impact on their ability to use a computer. On the other hand 35% continued to rate their computer skills as 'not very good' and 19% said that there had been no improvement in their computer skills over the period.

In terms of participants' gains in computer skills during the programme, it seems that there were few if any differences related to gender, age or cultural background.

Impact of programme on overcoming main literacy difficulties

Introduction

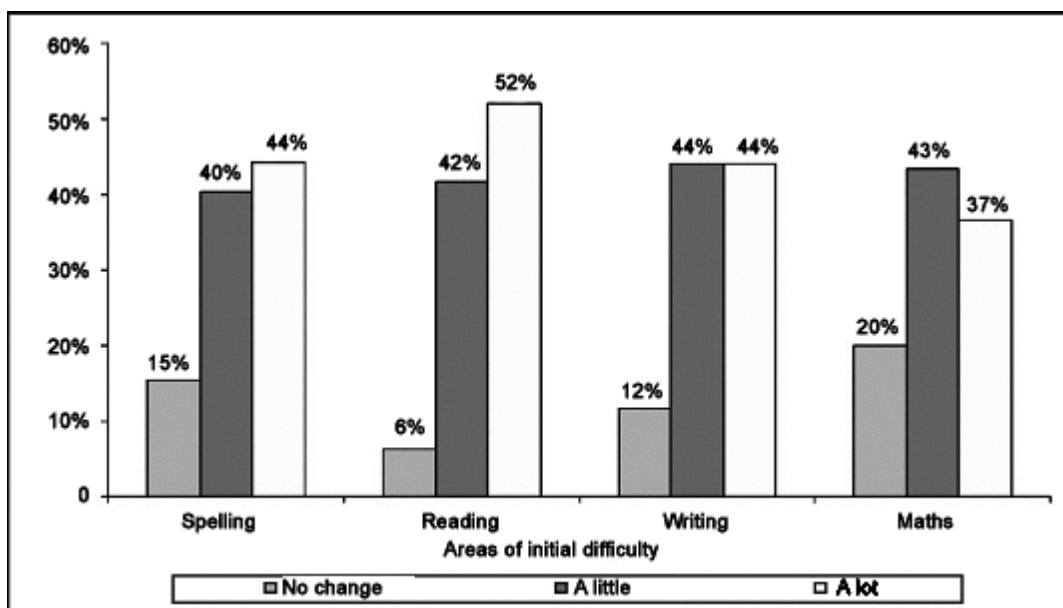
In the first section above we provided a quantitative analysis of interviewees' perceptions of the impact of the programme on their reading writing, spelling, maths and computer skills and abilities. In this section we take a somewhat different tack. In the first place, our form of analysis is different as we move primarily to a qualitative analysis of the interview data.

The focus also shifts somewhat to follow up on the data presented in Chapter Five. In that chapter we identified many of the initial difficulties experienced by interviewees in their attempts to cope with their literacy difficulties. In this section we examine how the interviewees feel about their difficulties now, whether their literacy strategies have changed, and the extent to which they believe that the literacy programme helped them to overcome their difficulties.

Following this introduction and overview, we set out the interviewees' judgements on the impact of the programme on their literacy skills: their reading, writing, spelling, maths, computer skills, speaking and communication skills, English language skills and general self-confidence. There are sub-sections which deal with reading; reading, writing and spelling; maths; the use of computers; speaking ability; and English language.

Figure 6 presents data on this from those interviewees who responded to this question.

Figure 6 – Self-ratings of improvements in areas of greatest difficulty
(n= 52 spelling, 48 reading, 34 writing, 30 maths)



This graph shows that the overwhelming majority of interviews rated their skills and abilities as have improved at least a little, if not a lot, over the period. On the other hand, there were only a few (rising to a maximum of 20% in the case of maths) who felt that there had been no improvement.

Impact on reading as greatest difficulty

A number of interviewees identified reading as their main area of difficulty or improvement as a consequence of their participation in the programme. Interviewees' responses have been organised into those who felt that the programme had a considerable positive impact on their reading, those who felt that they had made modest gains in reading but gained in confidence, and those who had made few if any reading gains and felt less confident as a consequence of their participation in the programme.

Considerable positive impact on reading

Lani said that she really struggled with reading, and that it had affected her life at work and at home. As a consequence of her participation she said that her reading improved dramatically and she also gained “a lot of confidence.”

It was quite amazing that I — my reading level jumped quite a few years because I was really bad, really bad, like say, a seven-year-old's reading level, I couldn't read.

[I can now] read almost anything in front of me. At work we have a step-by-step instruction. I can follow that [and at home] I can read to my daughter. I can help her with her homework [and I also enjoy] just casual reading, reading books at home.

Lee felt that her reading, spelling and speaking abilities and her confidence had grown enormously. She is now able to read to her children and help them with their homework. Her position at work has also changed and she reads more widely.

I read more now than I ever did. ... I don't just read junk mail ... being on the Internet, I've got to read a lot on there. I do quite a bit of research on different aspects of things.... And I'm inclined to use bigger words too.

Lance, who is autistic, feels that the programme helped him in a number of ways. In particular he has developed strategies to cope with reading difficulties.

What I generally do is, if I come to a word, I stop at it. I might run over it a couple of times, and if I don't get it, I continue on, then suddenly it'll click somewhere else.

Before attending the programme he said, “I'd read a book and I'd struggle.” Now he does a lot of reading.

After [the course ... my reading improved] quantum leaps — I felt that it was a groundswell event. It made me go ahead in leaps and bounds. After that I would grab every opportunity I could. One thing it has done socially is it's made [me] more tolerant and friendly.

Dennis said that the programme had “made quite a difference for him.”

Now I can read a paper a lot easier than what I used to be able to. Any letters that come in, I can basically work them out, whereas before I couldn't ... and if I can't work some of

it out, I just ask. The course taught us about being open to ask people 'cause I'm afraid society teaches you not to. In my case, in that course, it wasn't just the reading, writing and maths that I learnt, it was also plain and simple life skills as well, which is something that I never expected when I went there. It was sort of like I started all over again. So yeah, it's made quite a difference to me.

Noel's main difficulties before joining the programme were those of reading, writing and spelling. However the primary factor that he saw as pushing him to do something was his wish to be able to read to his children. As a consequence of attending the programme his reading confidence has increased. He said that one of the most important things that he learned is that,

I've got to let people know I have a reading and writing disability — not that it's as great as it used to be. It took me four times to pass my written and oral on my drivers' licence, only because I did not tell them I had a writing and reading disability. I didn't realise that people could actually read you the questions and that you could answer it; even though you had to write down the answers, I didn't know that. I know now if I go for an exam, I can say, 'Look I need someone just to check my reading if I get stuck, or something like that.'

With reference to his family Noel said,

I've got more confidence reading to the kids, like I don't feel so silly. Like my youngest one now is two and the next one is four, and the others are in their late teens. So it's given me a lot more confidence. I've got more confidence reading to them or helping them with their reading and whatnot, trying and encouraging them to read.

More generally he said, "I've learned that no matter how old you are, you can go and do something and achieve in it."

Ruth said that before joining the programme she had struggled with reading, spelling and writing. Indeed she said that she "couldn't read at all." By way of contrast, she said that things were very different now.

I've improved quite a bit and I do quite a lot of reading now ... I'm reading Stephen King books at the moment, and all these other books, and my work involves a lot of reading. There's some big words, but I've actually learnt to break them up and if I don't know the words now I just go and get

a dictionary and have a look at it [and] I'm not too scared to ask people to help me read something.

Modest gains in reading and more confident

Ellie, who is hard of hearing, had serious difficulties reading in the past both at home to her children and at work. She also had difficulties writing and filling in forms, although she had developed strategies to disguise these difficulties. Nowadays she is only able to read a little better. However she is much more confident and able to tell people when she has difficulties.

If necessary I still tell them I need to bring [forms] home [to fill in]. I'm working for [a bus company] driving buses and I think one of the guys knew straight away when I went for my interview. And he said to me, 'Look, you can be honest with me — can you read?' 'Nah. I can't read all these big words and that.' And he said, 'Well that's all right, I'll give you a hand.' I'm more brave than I was years ago; more confident to go and tell them I can't read, or I can't hear youse 'cause I'm half deaf.

Rosalie had struggled with reading and writing before joining the programme. She feels that her progress on the course was "quite good." She particularly welcomed the possibility of finding others with similar difficulties and the mutual help provided on the course. She is reading more now than she ever did in the past.

I'm getting into reading more, but I find myself, I get sort of angry with myself if I can't get a word so I just yeah give up which is the wrong thing. But, I'm reading the paper everyday, which I never did [before]. It takes me quite a while, but if I'm in a room by myself and I can take my time and do it, it's alright I can normally get my head around it but out in the public and stuff I avoid it ... I get paranoid that I'm taking longer than other people or that type of thing .. and I hate writing on even like birthday cards and stuff. I will get family members to do it for me.

Though Hannah still struggles with literacy, as a result of attending the literacy programme she now feels that things are a lot better.

I didn't really read at all until I went there, so it helped me learn to recognise words more, well more words. And my maths, it helped me with my maths. And more self-confidence. Well now, it's still hard but not as hard, because I can read a lot better. And if I get stuck I just ask my daughter cause she's a lot older.

Nicole recalls a number of difficulties including reading, spelling and writing that led her to join the programme. However she did have some good support from friends and family who helped her. She continues to need help “sometimes,” she said, “but ‘it isn’t too bad. The job I’m doing is quite good so I don’t really need anyone. I’m doing quite well.” In response to questions about how she copes now and whether there were many differences, she said that her literacy skills overall are not very different now from what they were previously. She does not do very much reading, she said,

just at work, with the patients and learning how to read their names and that. And different things with the patients, meals on the board, that’s about all.

Overall, however, she said that things have improved and she is more positive.

Since I left there I’m more open. I’m more get-up-and-go than what I was. ‘Cause they used to push me to do things and it was good. Just open and sort of don’t sit back like I used to. Well, I do a wee bit, but not like I used to.

Little or no gains in reading and less confident

Mark does not feel that his reading has improved as a result of participation in the programme. He attributes this in part to the fact that there “wasn’t enough staff” for sufficient one-to-one teaching. He does say, however, that he had begun to develop some skills in touch-typing, with the help and encouragement of a tutor who had “spent a lot of time with [him],” skills which he has largely lost since then as a consequence of “a lot of [negative] pressure from people” and the need for an ear operation. On the other hand, he felt that the programme had a negative impact on his self-confidence.

Reading, writing and spelling as greatest difficulties

A number of interviewees identified reading, writing and/or spelling as their main areas of difficulty or improvement as a consequence of their participation in the programme. Interviewees’ responses have been organised in this sub-section into five groups consisting of: those who felt that the programme had a considerable positive impact on their reading, writing and/or spelling; those who felt that the programme had had a positive impact in these areas; those who felt that they had made modest gains in these areas, but had gained in confidence; those whose gains had been variable; and those who had made few if any

gains in reading, writing, and/or spelling. This latter group is then organised into subsections based on the effects of the programme on interviewees' self-confidence.

Considerable positive impact on reading, writing and spelling

Scott had a wide range of literacy difficulties before joining the programme. He said that he although could read and write, he was a very slow reader and his poor spelling meant that he wrote slowly as well. He said that the literacy course "helped a lot ... I don't really notice the difficulties any more so." He works at a bakery and uses his new skills to read recipes.

When I do all the prep work I read all the recipes. They get me to write on the boards because apparently I've got the neatest writing.

He also does some reading at home now which is something he would not have "thought about beforehand." His life is quite different in many ways.

John said that a number of difficulties including reading, spelling, writing and maths difficulties had led him to join the literacy programme. Moreover he had a speech difficulty as well. He is clear that the programme has had a positive impact on many aspects of his life. He said, "my reading now is a lot better because I read more. My spelling has improved." He has also developed strategies to deal with difficulties. For example, to help him with filling in forms, about half way through the course he had decided to make a wee list" of key words and phrases commonly needed to complete forms and to "carry it around with me in my wallet. It's been great ever since," he said, "but as my spelling got better and better, I've hardly used it in the last two years." When asked how he uses his literacy skills now he said:

At the moment, I'm looking for a flat and for a job, and that involves looking through the papers and reading them, going to WINZ and filling out forms to keep my money coming in. That involves a bit of reading, writing, and spelling. I'm not so scared to try and spell something. If it's spelled wrong, I'm not so embarrassed. At least I give it a go. I've got more confidence in myself. I was a very shy person because of the way I spoke, my speech. I felt kind of strange because I couldn't spell properly or read properly or do my maths properly. Now I'm more confident. I have these little tips from what my teachers have taught me, and they've come in real handy in the last couple of years. Just to break down the words, talk slower, feel good about yourself, if you keep trying and trying, then you'll get there. And I've always had that in the back of my mind.

Jessica said that she gained some useful skills on the course.

I use a dictionary a lot now. Beforehand I used to, well, if I didn't understand a word I'd just skip it and go on, but I sort of pick a dictionary up now, and have a look and understand it more and that. But like, I'm a taxi driver now, yeah. Sort of got that job at the end of my course, so virtually went straight into employment. So it helped it a lot, also for street names that I can "... I wouldn't have even known how to spell them and that, but now I get a bit more of an idea and that.

Her spelling and reading have both improved a lot, she feels, and she said, "I read a few books now as well, where [before] I wouldn't even pick a book up."

Bob said that reading and writing were his main difficulties when he joined the programme. He said that his reading, along with his writing and spelling have improved a lot. He still sees himself as only an average reader, but he said he reads a lot better now. However there are still some writing tasks at work that he would prefer to avoid although he can do them if necessary.

I read a lot better now, I will sit down and read a book. It'll take me months because I only read a little bit at a time. I can't sort of concentrate on it. But, I can pick my way through forms. Spelling I still have a lot of trouble with. Now I don't really mind people reading my spelling mistakes, as long as they can read it. If I spell, and it looks the way it sounds, then that's all right. But I spell a lot of words the right way now instead of the wrong way. Things have improved.

Positive impact on reading, writing and spelling

Max, who used to hide his spelling and writing difficulties, said that he is now "a bit more open about it." He said that he is now able to manage better in "making out order forms and stuff like that" and that it has "pulled me out of my shell a bit more."

Jack said that he had enrolled in the literacy programme "to get my spelling reading and maths a bit more up to scratch." Having attended the course, he felt that he was "coping better with it now." However he still does "very little reading unless he has to." When asked whether his spelling, reading and writing are any different now compared with before joining the programme, he responded initially that he was unsure. He then said,

I would still have been able to do the things before [the course], but it would have taken more effort. I would have had to ask more if I was doing it correctly. A competence thing. A lot different than before.

He feels that his reading and writing have improved “a reasonable amount” and his spelling has improved “a little.”

Richard said that his main difficulties before joining the literacy programme had been with writing and spelling, though his reading had also been weak. He felt that there had been some improvement in each of these areas as a consequence of his participation in the literacy programme. He believes his “reading, writing and spelling level used to be age seven, but now it’s age eleven.”

Richard uses these skills now “on the Internet, the computer, at work sometimes ... [and because] I’m a New Zealand soccer referee, [I’ve] got to write reports.” Although he had improved his skills gradually over the past few years he saw it as an ongoing process, not yet complete. He still needed further help, he said, “in the proper environment.”

Terry had a number of longstanding literacy difficulties when he joined the programme. He said that he understood that these were associated with “an eye/mind communication problem.” Having attended the course, he said that he still has difficulties spelling. However “I can read quietly, [though] it does take me a lot of time.”

Writing is more difficult than reading. But I tell you what, on the course it was inspirational, the progress that I made with the use of a computer. Yes, that was inspirational.

Eric’s primary problems were in reading and spelling. However, this affected his writing, and he also struggled with maths. In response to the question whether the programme had helped him to overcome his difficulties he was very positive:

Before I went to [programme] I found reading boring and I really had quite a short attention span. I got bored really easily. Not so much now though. I actually think that comes with age as well.

Modest gains on reading, writing and spelling, but more confident

Doug had difficulties with reading, spelling and writing when he joined the literacy programme. He said that he still has

a little bit of difficulty. My wife helps me whenever I get stuck, but I'm a lot better than what I was before [and] it's a lot easier doing it now than what I did before 'cause I know I can do it now. It's made my working life a lot easier. I have forms to fill in at work now, so if I didn't go to [programme] and get that little bit more help. I would have been probably where I was before I went to [programme]. I can read my son books. It helped there. Mainly it was just filling in forms and reading. I can read the newspaper all right now. I'm much more confident. Before I was embarrassed because I was so old and I couldn't read books. I can read them now so that's increased my confidence a bit. At work with the forms, I couldn't do forms on my own but I can now. I've got a lot more enjoyment out of life now that I can read and write properly.

Diane describes a number of serious long-standing difficulties including reading and writing, and in maths, spelling and speaking. She understands them to have arisen out of her dyslexia. She feels now that her reading and writing have improved and she attributes this partly to her experience on the literacy programme and partly to a computer programme she had bought a long time previously.

Rosalie identified several difficulties she had been experiencing before joining the literacy programme. These included writing and spelling as well as reading. In thinking about changes since completing the programme she said,

I can read a lot better than I used to. It was a big thing. It was a world out there now. I'm a very shy person and I used to block life off and close myself in. But since I've been there, I've come out of my shell a little bit more than I used to.

Variable impacts and changes on reading, writing and spelling

One of Ross's main difficulties before joining the literacy programme had been writing. Cautiously he now said,

I don't think it's quite as bad as what it was. I still probably have a wee way to go. I think it has certainly sharpened me up a lot. I can do things that I wouldn't have tried before attending the course. My progress was good.

On the other hand, he felt that his reading has improved a lot. "It has improved," he said, "because I can sit down and read the paper, virtually right through. And letters that arrive - it's not a problem now."

Alison said that before joining the literacy programme, spelling had been her greatest difficulty. She also said that her “reading and writing [and her maths] at the time weren't that great.” She said that her maths “still isn't that good, but her reading and writing have improved something wicked.” She said that in the past she had avoided reading and writing and hence had not enrolled for courses that she had wanted to take on. She is now doing a course on animal care that requires “me to do a lot of reading and a lot of studying and stuff like that.” She does have access to a reader/writer for her course work and for the examinations. However she does do more reading than she used to do and has clearly gained in confidence.

If I didn't have the reader/writer I'd be OK. But the notes would be a bit funny, especially when it's early — especially when I'm early morning too, work wise as well.

Few, if any changes on reading, writing and spelling, but more confident

Ewan said that before joining the literacy programme spelling had been his biggest problem and this led on to writing difficulties. By way of contrast, he said that things are very different now.

I still have a few [spelling] problems but I've got a nice partner now who helps me out 'cause I've just got two young children. She helps me out quite a bit.

At work he said that there is not too much spelling, but if you are responsible for answering the phone “you have to remember how to spell the names of the people.”

He said that he “can get a lot more out of a job now than I could years ago.”

Marie described many of the long-standing difficulties that she had experienced before enrolling on the course. She was well aware that the course had not worked a miracle for her. Nor had she expected it to do so. For example, she made the following comments.

My spelling still hasn't improved. But I think there are other reasons for that ... [She said that she had a very difficult birth and was lucky to be alive.]. I should be a lot more disabled than I am ... I can't remember my own phone number... My spelling's not much different than before. That's not the course's fault. I've tried hard since. Even my husband has tried hard to get me to learn, but it could be just my birth thing.

However she does have the support of her husband and is able to give him support as well:

My husband helps me out a lot. I've helped him out a lot too. He was hit by a truck and he at times has trouble with things where he can't spell and I'm able to verbally communicate more for him. We both have problems but we help each other out in different areas. We complement each other. I still read a lot. I try filling out my own forms more. At times I have my address written down first because I will need my address. I try and do more things like that myself. Not relying on others so much.

Few, if any, changes in reading, writing and spelling and no effect on confidence

Grant is a man in his 40s using a wheelchair as a result of an accident. His head injury, he said, affected his memory as well as his reading and writing. He joined the literacy programme to learn the Road Code: "I focused on the Road Code, but I learned a lot of other stuff." His reading and writing may have improved a little during the course so that he can read the power bill and can look at his hot rod books. But he doesn't do much reading and he feels there is not much difference in his skills so that he still relies on the home help and on his girlfriends. On the other hand, when asked what the programme had achieved for him, he responded at once,

Got my licence back. Yeah, I got it back, flying colours. I don't think I got anything at all wrong.

Thomas said that his main problem before joining the literacy programme had been his reading and spelling. He was cautious in evaluating his progress on the literacy course, and attributed his progress primarily to a counsellor and the help he has received elsewhere. In particular he explained his progress in terms of a fundamental change in the perceptions he has of his abilities — perceptions that still have to accommodate recognition of reading difficulties while recognising other intellectual abilities.

Well since I got myself a counsellor ... and since I found out I'm not retarded or anything like that, I don't tell people I have a reading problem. I don't let on about it. Because, to look at me and to listen to me, you wouldn't take me for a person who has a reading problem. I'm more upfront, I'm more confronting of people than I used to be. I don't let people push me around like I used to. I'm still intimidated by government departments. It's just something about them. I'm still not attached. I'm still a bit ... standoffish

toward women because I don't want them to know about my reading problem. I'd rather be working fulltime than part-time.

His view is that insufficient resources are being allocated to literacy programmes for children, young people and adults and that his tutor had too many students to be able to offer the intensive help many require.

Emma said that reading, spelling and maths were her main difficulties when she enrolled for the course. There has been little change since she attended the course.

She said she used to procrastinate in the past and that "it's still the same. It's just such a mental strain." Her reading ability has gone up and down in her life.

When I left school — I actually was expelled — I had a reading level of a five year old. And just within six months it was where it should be, and then I stopped reading again.

When she was on the course her skills improved considerably.

And then while I was there at the course I was probably the top student in the class as far as anything goes and I spent a lot of time with the others helping them read. Yeah, I mean I read *The Piano* while I was there [on the course] and *Once Were Warriors* and the follow on of *Once Were Warriors* too. I really have to be in the right frame of mind to read. I mean I've got several books out of the library and if I'm really interested in that book I will read it, yeah. I guess it was because I was out of practice actually doing it, but once I was in that sort of frame of mind probably yeah, I did improve.

However she feels now that things are now much the same as they were.

My son helps me, OK? I mean even now if someone gives me a form I ask them to fill it in. I actually went to the hairdressers last week. And I'd been rushing around and I get there and she asks me to fill in a form. And it was just my name, address, date of birth — no, the month I was born. And I put the month I was born was May 'cause I really couldn't be bothered thinking of how to spell 'September'. And I wrote down my address and I actually even wrote my address down wrong.

Few, if any, changes in reading, writing and spelling and less confident

Janice said that her main difficulties before joining the programme were in reading and spelling. She only attended the programme for six weeks, and felt that her skills had not improved as a consequence of attending the programme. Indeed she said that her experience on the programme may have had a negative effect on her.

Oh yeah, I still very much hide it, 'cause I'm very ashamed of it, and it's — I tend to beat myself up a lot about it, but when I do go into those situations I find it hard to deal with. Well honestly it [the course] really made me feel upset because the people in my classroom at the time, they were more advantaged than I was, and I had to have someone sitting next to me a lot of the time to help me and I felt quite small. I was beating myself up all the time in other words. I found it very, very difficult.

Jane said that her reading is “about the same as it was before I went there. I can read, but it hasn't changed.” The same thing applies to her writing. On the other hand she said that her spelling has improved,

I've learnt a few skills and that, but I never learnt that till I was there for a year and a half. I learnt it in the last half of the year which I was really disappointed. I'm not great, but I've picked up a bit.

She said that she has picked up some computer skills, but not as a result of the course. The computer section of the course she found disappointing. She knew absolutely nothing about computers at the time and feels that she did not receive enough direct instruction, “I've learnt more from my daughter and other people than what I did from the course.” Overall, she feels that in spite of her initial high expectations, the course had made little if any difference to her life.

Writing and spelling as main difficulties

A number of interviewees identified writing and/or spelling as their main areas of difficulty or improvement as a consequence of their participation in the programme.

Considerable positive impact on writing and spelling

In response to the question whether the programme had helped him to overcome his difficulties, Eric was very positive and referred among other things to aspects of writing:

I learned a lot more about how to write out a paragraph, where the full stops went, didn't really pick up on more of my spelling ability. I did learn a few more words, but they were just words. They weren't an entire paragraph. Like, I couldn't sit down and write out an entire paragraph without having a dictionary by my side and then getting someone to check it over afterwards, because I think some words sounds like it should be that word and it's not that word. But the thing is, I do have to say, I was much better at sounding out words and putting a paragraph together. So it did help me out quite a lot actually even though I probably could have stayed there for a good two years and picked up heaps more.

Noel's writing ability has improved. He is doing modules at work faster than usual,

and my partner can actually read when I leave notes for her on the fridge. She actually said I've improved quite a lot because I used to have chicken scribble, you couldn't read it, and understanding it was even harder. And now she can understand what I'm writing and leaving messages for.

Lee's position at work has changed. Previously she had struggled to read instructions and was fearful of writing.

Now I just write out all the instructions on how to do [the job] and what tools to use. I've been doing a lot of that lately. I'm very nervous about it still. But I do do it. I'm not afraid to show it to the rest of the staff to correct anything... Nowadays, I'm open to improvement. I don't mind being criticised. Before I would, if someone criticised me, that was it; I wouldn't do anything in front of them again. And it's only since being the supervisor that I actually get to do that now.

The position of Martin, who had in the past struggled with spelling, is now "100% different — I can do it now," he said. He has developed strategies to deal with these problems.

I get out a piece of paper and I sit down and break the word down and I'll look at it and I'll knock it around a bit and I'll sound it out and if it doesn't sound right, yeah I'll work with it till I get it.

Later in the interview he added,

I write everyday. I don't have too much problem with spelling. If I do, I stop, go back to the tools that I was given,

and nut them out. Don't get them all right, but I get ninety percent of it right. I'm still finding some difficulty in putting pen to paper. I can do it, but it takes quite some time. It still needs a bit of work. It has improved because of the course - a little.

Some positive changes in writing and spelling

Chris said that things were a little better now than they had been earlier in his life.

I'm a wee bit better now. I'm sort of honest now. Like if I can't spell something, I say I can't spell it, and we'll have a look in the dictionary to see if we can find it together, sort of thing. I still struggle, I must admit, I'm not perfect, but the people I work with are very good so they help out a wee bit. I think it's just being honest with yourself now saying that I can't do this. But back when you're a kid it's a wee bit different.

And when asked to rate his progress as a result of attending the course, he said,

Great. I've come leaps and bounds. I'm working in a school as a teacher's aide. Before that I was just labouring on a farm for about \$6 an hour. My whole life's sort of changed around really.

Colin's main difficulty before joining the literacy programme was spelling, which also meant writing difficulties. At the time of the interview he said that the problem was not as great as it had been. Prior to taking the course, he said that he had been forced to rely on his memory, but now, he said, "I'm still improving, now I make myself write some of the grocery list down or if I'm needing something I also use more shorthand which helps me with everyday things." He also said that things generally are very different for him now:

Because I'm more open to asking for advice. I've a new range of skills that I can use when I need it to deal with any given situation. I'd say it was more of a rounded life in the way of being able to cope in different situations now. I feel more free to ask for help from somebody to fill out a form. And I'm definitely not as shy about having that problem. Just gave me more self-confidence to move forward in my life and start achieving my own personal goals and looking for a more fulfilled job that I always wanted, that I felt was out of reach because of the spelling aspects for me, didn't allow me to do that sort of work. But now I'm more aware of

aids and spelling skills and strategies to deal with any situation that came up.

Few, if any, changes in writing and spelling skills, but increased confidence

Deborah said that spelling, along with writing, were her biggest difficulties before joining the course. She also said that she had been diagnosed with dyspraxia. She had coped in the past by avoiding as much as possible situations where she might have to write. Having attended the literacy course she was asked how she coped with these difficulties now.

I don't know really. Similar but with more confidence. I don't let it put a damper on what I want to do ... I do lots of writing and use the computer a lot to get through my spelling difficulties. And I can still go to [programme] if I need to and get something proof read without any problems.

She was also asked whether her writing improved because of the course.

Well it might not have .. [improved] directly because of the course, but indirectly a lot. The course gave me more confidence to go ahead and try things, and because of that confidence I did more, which of course has improved my spelling. But if I hadn't got the confidence I wouldn't have tried to do anything more.

Few, if any, changes in writing and spelling skills and no effects on confidence

Jeff said that his main difficulties when he joined the literacy programme were in spelling and maths. In addition, he had a speech impediment. Looking back he said that there have been very few, if any, changes. However, he does say that his writing, spelling and computer skills may have improved "a little."

Pam, whose first language is Māori, said that spelling (in English) was one of the main difficulties that led to her enrolment on the adult literacy programme. She emphasised that her reading, which she saw as "average," had not presented a problem. On the other hand her spelling ability had improved only a little on the course and she still struggles with spelling. "Even just to write a note. I still have difficulties, and now I think I'm getting too old." In fact, she feels that she has recently made so little use of the spelling abilities she learned on the course that "I'm right back to where I was."

Mathematics

Several interviewees identified mathematics (maths) as their main area of difficulty or improvement as a consequence of their participation in the programme. Interviewees' responses have been organised into those who felt that the programme had a considerable positive impact on their maths, those who reported some positive changes in their maths skills; and those who reported few if any changes in their math abilities.

Considerable positive impact in maths

Tamara enrolled for the course with the very specific aim of improving her maths. In spite of many difficulties she feels now that she is fairly competent at sixth form level. She attributes this in part to her six months experience on the programme. She said, "as far as my maths skills [were concerned], it was brilliant; personally, [however] it was terrible."

Jimmy said that his maths is very much better now than it was in the past. He said that he is using his new knowledge in the workplace.

I'm working as a baker now and my boss asked me for that gross profit thing, stocktaking and I'm quoting weights and measurements. Like sometimes I have to work out a recipe that, say, makes eighteen cakes so I have to reduce it to make four. Before I went there I struggled to do this calculation. I had no idea how to do it. But now, I can do it 'cause when I was up in [city] I worked for [firm] and this boss, I tried to calculate one of the recipes so I just did it and told him and he didn't believe me. But I tried and he said "oh you do it", and then I did it, comes straight away and just before I left he asked me how to do it, so quite funny.

Bob said that his maths has improved a lot — "I've never really thought about it before, but yeah after, because I actually got School Cert, which was quite a shock."

Some positive changes in maths

Martin, who had in the past struggled with maths, said that he used to avoid dealing with any problems that needed maths. He is now a little more confident. "I'm better," he said, "but it's still a very cloudy area for me."

Marie said that her maths has improved a little".

For some reason I was able to improve a bit on the maths. Working out how you put figures together and count them up. It's just one particular area that pulls me down all the time.

Though Hannah still struggles with her reading, she now feels that things are a lot better with her maths.

I didn't really read at all until I went there, so it helped me learn to recognise words more, well more words. And my maths, it helped me with my maths. And more self-confidence.

Few, if any, changes in maths skills

At the time when she joined the literacy programme Alison said that her "reading and writing [and her maths] weren't that great." She said that her maths "still isn't that good."

Pam also felt that her maths abilities had not really changed as a result of attending the course.

Use of computers — positive impact

A number of interviewees said that an important feature of the programme was the opportunity to learn to use computers more effectively.

The biggest change for Martin was in connection with his computer skills. Not only did he learn to use a computer; he has also learned to build them! He had scarcely touched a computer before joining the programme; but now

I put them together. I had three computers here. I used to get second-hand parts out of the dump, put them together and yeah, it was good. I still do it. Still full on. I've just been out there and yeah. It's something I won't stop, and the kids are doing it, they're learning. My boy's learning how to build them and all the rest of it's just something you pass on, you know. It's just lack of money that stops it going further.

Lee said that her computer skills have increased:

I've done a course at polytech on Excel. I always could use Excel because I put my budget on it but I wanted to learn how to use the other buttons on it. I'm going to start on Word and work my way through all the other things. I do photo editing and all that on the computer.

Alison said that she did not do much computer work on the course, but what she did do was beneficial and helped her when she came to take a later course specifically on the use of computers.

Terry said that his biggest gain on the programme had been in his computer skills.

He finds writing more difficult than reading, but thought that the use of computers on the course was “inspirational.” He says, however, that he recognises he has a lot of work still to do, but that the possibilities are “enormous.”

I'm only just getting proficient, only just getting established using a computer. Even writing with the computer I'm only writing a small number of words. The ability to have the spell check and things like that, is just enormous. I've been considering selling my tools and my car to get a computer that's suitable for me to work with. Because I know that once I get the technology on my side. I'm going to work on it. It will happen.

Because of his new computer skills, Terry rated his experience of the programme very positively.

Speaking skills

A number of interviewees identified issues of speech, speaking and oral communication as their main areas of difficulty or improvement as a consequence of their participation in the programme. The overwhelming majority of these learners claimed a very positive impact in this area, with only one person saying that the programme had little if any impact on her speaking ability.

Considerable positive impact on speaking skills

Lee feels that her ability to speak in public has grown.

My hands get sweaty, my heart races. I'm still very nervous, but because of the position I'm in at work, I've got to. I don't think I would have even got that far if I hadn't gone to the course.

One of Eric's biggest achievements was his increased confidence in his ability to communicate effectively and what he sees as a increase in maturity.

I can talk freely now and if I've got something to contribute that is not going to hurt anyone else or anyone else's feelings. I can now join in a conversation and not be too

worried about how I'm going to come across, or what I sound like. Before, I didn't always pronounce words right either. So I would think a word would go in the actual sentence I was trying to say and the word didn't even *mean* what I was trying to say. Sometimes you can come off looking a bit stupid, can't ya? Especially if you're not sure what you're talking about. Now I know exactly what I'm talking about, but once again I think that comes with age. I don't think it's necessarily something to do with the course. The course taught me to observe a wee bit more, listen a wee bit more, think before you speak, things like that.

Barry had a number of difficulties before joining the literacy programme, including reading, spelling and speaking. Since attending the programme he said that he had gained the confidence to tell people of his difficulties and ask for help.

I just tell people, I don't really care what they think. I tell them and if they don't say something, I don't get embarrassed or anything like that.

He said that things were very different for him now.

I mean, before going [on the course] I wouldn't have picked up a book, I wouldn't have spoken to anybody, I wouldn't have started a — I couldn't have a conversation for anybody. I'd just sit out at the smoko room or lunchtime, just sit there and do nothing, or play cards. Whereas I talk to people now.

Diane described a number of difficulties including speaking which she attributed to dyslexia, but felt that her speech has improved.

When I was in school and stuff, I couldn't ... my speech wasn't good; it wouldn't come out very clearly. It took me so long to think of what to say and how to put it and stuff. And now I've been told by some of my friends that my speech is so much better. So it's really helped me quite a bit.

Kelly attributes many of her literacy difficulties to ill-health when she was a teenager.

She said that her greatest difficulty at the time she joined the course was probably her speaking as she had a lisp. She feels that the programme has helped with her speaking and her confidence. She is now a preschool leader and is now more confident. Before joining the course, she said that she couldn't read a story to the children.

I used to hate my own voice before, but now I don't think about it, the kids don't mind, and I'm calmer. Things are a bit different.

Pam feels that her speaking ability and confidence in speaking has grown. Before the course she felt that "I was no good for conversation. I thought I had nothing to say."

She now feels far more positive about her ability to speak:

Yes, it's because I'm a Māori Warden. And I work beside people, so yeah. And I work with the Police so ... [and] I have a good sense of humour.

She looks back on the course as a really good experience not least because of the camaraderie and solidarity on the course.

It was good for all of us, because none of us ran one another down. It was really good. We were all on the same level. So I think that was the beauty of it. There wasn't one better than the other. None of us challenged one another. It was really good. I enjoyed the course.

Little, if any, change in speaking skills

Jeff had a long-standing speech impediment. This remains his biggest difficulty. He said that his speaking ability is still about the same as it was before the course.

I don't like speaking to children or teenagers because of my past. I've still got a bit of a speech impediment, and I don't speak to children or teenagers, 'cause I used to get picked on a lot and it put me right off.

English language issues

A small number of interviewees were people who had first languages other than English.

Jimmy, whose first language is Samoan, said that his reading and writing as well as his confidence in speaking in English have improved a lot. "Before I went there I could hardly write, but when I was there I did a lot of writing stories. I gained a lot of confidence from there in writing."

Fatima is an immigrant who said that writing and spelling in English were her biggest difficulties when she enrolled for the course. She said that her English writing and speaking have improved a lot and that the literacy programme made an important contribution to this.

CHAPTER 8

The wider impact of adult literacy programmes

I'm more. (Tony)

It did wonders for a lot of people and I feel quite fuzzy, warm when I think about it. It was good, one of the best things I ever did in my life. (Martin)

Introduction

Education is fundamentally about change. The most obvious changes occur in the learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes — all of which are what assessment measures. But there are often wider, less obvious impacts that occur as a result of education. These 'ripple' effects occur in learners' home lives, their workplaces and the various communities in which they participate. These 'wider benefits' have become an important focus in broader debates about the value of lifelong learning (Benseman, 2003b). This chapter therefore explores some of the wider benefits that the interviewees reported in their lives since attending the programmes at Hagley and CPIT.

General confidence

The most frequent benefit that the participants identified for themselves was undoubtedly improved self-confidence and motivation.

Just boosted up my confidence so I could go out there and do something with my life. Yeah, otherwise I'd still be sitting at home collecting the benefit and I'm quite glad I'm not doing — that would be pretty sad. (Aaron)

I mean one thing going to [programme], it did get you motivated. I have to agree, I never would have thought that but yeah, it got you motivated. (Jane)

And with the confidence has come greater contentment for Tony.

Oh yeah, and a lot happier. Definitely a lot happier. A lot more outgoing. Yeah, I enjoy life.

Although he can see the positive aspects now, Colin stressed that the journey was far from straightforward or easy.

I have been on a little bit of an emotional roller coaster with the whole thing. It was really sort of dealing with a sensitive area in my life and two years was quite a long period of time to be actually sort of struggling with that sort of problem, that sort of weakness. I had my ups and downs, but overall I look upon it as more of an achievement than anything. It gave me a whole range of skills. I feel much more positive about it now.

Their newfound confidence gave them the necessary boost to go and try new ventures and to approach them with greater self-assurance.

[I am] confident enough to try university and then go onto Teachers' College. Confident enough to pack up and move from one country to another — get a job before I even leave. (Deborah)

But other changes they reported were less specific and simply related to everyday life.

It has boosted my self-esteem. I had a very shallow way of dealing with things before. Being able to speak to people. I used to walk around with my head down a lot before I joined [programme]. It's enabled me to express myself a lot more. (Ross)

More the personal parts of things 'cause I was a very quiet person, I'd just keep myself to myself. Now that I've gone through [programme] and I've opened up more. I can talk more freely and express myself more and when it comes time to some discussions I put my two cents worth in and state my opinion. Like before I wouldn't, I'd just keep myself quiet and if there was something wrong I'd hold it to myself and wait till it bottles up and then I'd explode and I sort of ... I let people know. I'm more open. Oh, much more confident. I'm more willing to take more risks in regards to conversation. I'm more willing to take more chances and more responsibility on myself. I've used my initiative a lot more 'cause I can read more and it boosts confidence and you want to do more for yourself to impress the boss, you know 'cause he can go "Oh, you know, he's a good bloke to keep on" sort of thing. "I might move him up in the chain and give him a higher position in the farming." Boosts morale. (Jordan)

The link between literacy skills and confidence

While Melinda acknowledges that she learnt new literacy skills, she saw her own experience much more as a change in self-perception — albeit prompted by a literacy programme.

Sometimes when I look back at it, I wonder how much progress I did make, but I think the main progress was the confidence to actually realise my mindset to change. I realised that there were people out there who were a lot worse off than me in that learning area and that I just needed to get on with life and I couldn't let this stop me any more, and I just had to find ways to you know, make it work. So, I mean I did improve — I know I improved a bit in my spelling areas, probably the most because of learning different ways of doing things.

John's comments show very clearly how his greater confidence was related to his improved literacy skills.

When I was at [programme], I was a very shy person because of the way I spoke, my speech. I felt kind of strange because I couldn't spell properly or read properly or do my maths properly. Now I'm more confident. I have these little tips from what my teachers have taught me, and they've have come in real handy in the last couple of years. Just to break down the words, talk slower, feel good about yourself, if you keep trying and trying, then you'll get there. And I've always had that in the back of my mind. I'm more confident with my friends 'cause I know that I can speak better. If I write down someone's phone number, or I write down someone's name, or if I'm writing a quick message, I can spell it right. If I can't spell it right, I can write it in a different way so it sounds better. I'm more confident. I'm more outgoing. That was a big part of it. I didn't like hanging out with groups back then. I just kept to myself, but these days I can mix and mingle with just about anybody. It's been good.

The confidence/literacy skills link becomes a positive cycle of development when improved skills increase confidence, which in turn increases literacy skills – reflected in Dennis's observations about his experience.

It wasn't just the reading, writing and maths that I learnt, it was also plain and simply life skills as well, which is something that I never expected when I went there. It was sort of like I started all over again.

Social skills and aspirations

Feelings of greater self-confidence also transfer through into social skills in everyday life. In reflecting on what impact the programme had for him, Bob observed,

Oh, there were so many. I think it helped, apart from the reading and writing, I think the biggest thing [programme] did for me was my communications and socialisation. Before, where I wouldn't have anything to do with people and you get into that sort of group situation ... and now I am sort of outgoing.

Scott made a similar observation.

Probably given me people skills with the interaction with the other people on the course, which I didn't have beforehand.

In addition to feeling generally more confident and more skilled in social situations, interviewees also talked about new aspirations resulting from the programme. In some cases, the aspirations were by no means exceptional, but nonetheless were significant in raising their levels of expectation — and hopefully, satisfaction in the longer term.

My confidence in thinking I can do a job. Where before I sort of thought, 'Oh I'd love to do that — no I haven't got the skills,' where now it's like, 'Yeah, I think I could do that.' Like I don't have to sort of set myself up for the mundane jobs. I know that I can sort of set my sights at being something a lot better than a cleaner sort of thing, yeah. Not that there's anything wrong with being a cleaner.
(Jessica)

For some, these aspirations involved moving into entirely new types of work.

Well my thoughts of employment before I was at [programme] were cleaning, machining and any low paid work, where anyone would have me. Now I'm going to be a professional. (Deborah)

And a few had already started achieving their new goals.

Yeah, my goal then just changed, because you know my life has changed too. Because of that it has changed, but it has given me lots of confidence and it was great to get accepted. I mean, I never said, "It is really hard to get into

[profession].” It was great to actually get into it and yeah, get to that level where I knew that I could do it. Now I am doing the ... I’m doing the [professional diploma] at the present. (Melinda)

“I’m not alone in this”

Finally in this sub-section we highlight a key finding. For some of the participants the programme provided a space and opportunity to find out that they were not alone with their difficulties. One of its key functions for them was to facilitate a process of redefining their ‘private troubles’ associated with reading, writing, spelling, speaking and maths difficulties into shared ‘public issues’. For some this entailed a shift in their self-perceptions. It meant that they could begin to see themselves not as deficient or inadequate, but as people who were just as good as others.

Looking back on her reasons for joining the literacy programme, Melinda said that the programme contributed in important ways to her current sense of achievement and self-confidence.

I suppose that my main difficulty was ... I mean I used to think, ‘Oh, I’m really stupid, I can’t do things’, and I suppose going to [programme] I realised that I actually can do heaps of stuff, and there was people there that could do much less than me that were in their 50’s, 60’s that couldn’t even read, you know, ‘cat’ and that sort of stuff. And it gave me lots of confidence and it helped me, because I could give back to them as well, and that’s what was really good about [programme] is that you all went at your own level and you didn’t, and you would learn from everyone, everyone had something to give to you, because you all have different areas that you were you know good in, and other things.

When she completed the literacy programme, her application to study for midwifery was accepted. She felt that this was recognition of her increased skills. However she decided to defer her studies for a year in order to do some travelling, and on her return she decided on a change her direction and she is currently studying for a professional diploma. She feels that she could not have done any of this without the self-confidence that she gained on the course.

When Hannah joined the programme she could not read at all and her spelling was poor. The programme itself was very different from anything she had previously experienced. She said, “It helped me out tremendously.” By taking the programme she had discovered that she was not alone with her problem.

I didn't realise there were so many people that had my problem. I thought — well you seem to think you're the only one until you get to meet others.

Jessica said that the course helped her in a number of ways. She said that it motivated her finding others who had similar problems or who were worse off than she was.

It motivated me 'cause like you're with others and you help them out and that, so, it's like you're not the only one where before you always thought that you were the only one like it and that. So it sort of opened my eyes that there's others out there worse than me and others out there better than me. See I thought I was quite bad at my spelling and reading and that. But when I was there, there were people worse than me. So yeah sort of thought here I can help other people out instead of just me being helped all the time.

Impact at work

Confidence at work

Before the programme Ruth said she did not even have had the confidence to apply for a job. But because she now feels more confident about herself and her literacy skills, she has been much more persistent in her pursuit of a job.

I've applied for fifty-six jobs so far. I'm only at the moment kind of doing twenty hours a week, which is not much so I'm looking for a forty-hour week. It's given me the confidence to write letters and stuff.

Tony's greater confidence meant that he has been able to apply for a truck-driving job and make use of a licence he had never used before.

In all honesty I wouldn't have had the confidence to go for the job in the first place. As a driver, a truck driver like I've had my licence since I was twenty and never used it. Until after I'd — yeah, just changed my whole outlook, just the confidence. I had more confidence to go out and try different things so I went for it. Now I've been driving for like three years. Yeah, just the general way I live I guess. I'm more.

Paul's experience has shown him that his first job was not a chance happening and he now has confidence to manage his career path in a direction that matches his aspirations.

I applied for that job and they gave me the job and I was there for five years. I've since quit that job. So resigned from there and I thought, 'Well it took you ages to get that job so be very careful; if you have too much time off, it might be a bit too frightening for you to apply for something else which means writing out of a CV and updating my CV and writing out an application for the new job.' I thought it was about time to apply for a new job. So I now work for a firm, I've been there eight months. I applied for that job on my own from the newspaper. I got a friend to update my CV on my computer at home. I handwrote out an application on my own. So that course did help me out heaps because before I went to that course I wouldn't have been able to actually do that. I handwrote out the application, got my partner to go over it, rewrote it, sent it away. My first job interview, and I got the job. Six years ago there's no way I could've done that. And before I went to that course I was very depressed. And some days I was very, very low.

Chris and Martin also felt more confident in applying for jobs and have found that they now handle the day-to-day tasks of their jobs more easily.

The confidence is the big thing. I think if your confidence goes on you, it's just so hard to try and get it back. [But because I gained confidence] I felt like I *can* do this. I *can* become what I want to become instead of thinking, 'Oh, I'm just a dummy.' I think actually being able to talk to people on the staff here and just being natural with them. I would never be able to do that before. Even ringing up on the phone and arranging things with people. People have noticed a change, who are close to me. (Chris)

[I'm] much more confident. Being able to order and also being able to put in seating and plants and gardens. A lot of technical stuff. (Martin)

Greater confidence for Lee has meant not only did she secure a job, but that she now speaks out at work in her new job as a supervisor and is more forthright in her dealings with management.

I wouldn't have got the job if I didn't. I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for it. I had to write out a CV and probably because I can pick up quickly what people show me, reading the instructions, I sort of bluffed it at the very beginning 'cause I was too nervous. I wouldn't be in this

position today. I am a different person — my mum can tell you that. She was so proud that I'd actually stepped forward and did something like that.

Well, I'm a supervisor now and I never thought I would be one. But yeah, I can actually and will actually read now in front of people. I don't get my way out of it any more. Like even me being in my supervisor job, we have a meeting every Tuesday and I would quite easily not say anything, but I do. And it sort of helps to open my mouth. Unfortunately sometimes I can't shut it... It has changed my life for the better. ... Yes, I know and now I'm sort of like fighting contracts at the moment. I still have issues talking to people, especially people in authority. I get too emotional and it's really not good for me. But yeah, I stood up for myself on Monday so it was really good. They were trying to get me to sign a contract that was just a standard contract, but I wouldn't do it because I didn't like it. I basically told them, "You know what I'm like 'cause I've worked here for six years. You make out a contract that you think I'm worth and then we'll go from there." So yeah, that's the first time I've ever actually stood up for myself like that.

Martin has also found his confidence invaluable in his new management role.

I've got some major people in big companies in town here listening to what I have to say and taking notice and carrying out things that I've asked them to do, it's not a problem. I would never have done that before. Just not being nervous around other people, I used to be quite nervous around people 'cause if you were just a labourer, just a driver and now I'm not, I feel that I have an important position and I can give to others too like I can teach them what I know.

Changes of job

People like Bob and Martin are very clear that participating in the literacy programmes helped them change to jobs that they would never have had otherwise.

I think that probably the only impact that it had on it was it got me the job I have got now. It has helped a long way towards that. If I hadn't gone to [programme], then I don't think I would be where I am now. Now I am a [occupation] I run my own business and I employ staff. Yeah, so I

wouldn't be there, I would still be in a factory somewhere.
(Bob)

Since I left [programme] I set out, when I started I set out to be a — I wanted to be a [occupation] foreman. And when I finished [there] I walked straight into a foreman's job because of my skills, because I learned there. Now I'm making really good money and I'm happy as. Changed my life you know, it's all because of wanting to learn, not being forced to, but wanting to, and I think that comes as you grow up sort of thing. You realise what you miss out on when you don't want to pull the line at school. Which of course spills over to the children at home too. (Martin)

A few like Jordan and Melinda have come a long way in their working lives even in the short time since leaving the programme — and still have bigger goals in mind.

Well I left [programme] and there was a course at [educational agency], a dairy farming course and I went there for about six to eight months and from there I was employed as a dairy farmer. I now milk a thousand cows in [district]. And I've been here for two years. My goal is to own my own property. But I'm fighting for that, trying to save and there's a lot of bookwork involved as well. Like there's not — it's not just farming you know, I've got to work out my grasses for my cows and how much grass each cow has to have and then there's fertilizer paddocks and so on and so forth. (Jordan)

Yeah, I have got two jobs. I work, at the moment, I work as a street outreach worker, which is social work based, youth work social work based working for [youth agency] and they have got a joint project with the [group] and I work on the streets and also do one on one case work with 12 to 25 year-old sex street workers and I also work 20 hours for [social agency] as a social worker, youth social worker for 12 to 25 year-old young people with disabilities. (Melinda)

Use of literacy skills at work

Most jobs, even those classified as low-skill, involve increasing amounts of literacy-based tasks and components.

I'm a product assistant. So it's mainly filling out reports, work evaluation, product evaluation, what else? Quality control. Just having to write up a lot of individual reports pretty much. (Ben)

Well I'm a dairy farmer and so I need to be able to read chemicals and instruction manuals for operating different equipment. Also when we get stock trucks come in or we get supplies bought in I need to be able to read documents that I'm receiving the right stuff and sign off for it. And when we take stock away I've got to be able to read TB docketts and that sort of thing. (Jordan)

In some cases, there are substantial repercussions with any errors that occur as a result of poor skills.

No, well it gets a bit scary when I've got to mix these chemicals together and I've thought, I had to go through what the book says, 'cause I mix glue chemicals together at times. You do [need to get that right], if you don't, you can have thousands [of products] fail. (Patricia)

So having improved literacy skills means that everyday tasks are done more easily and competently.

I'm a car groomer and we have forms that we have to fill in and after every car that we finish. You have to fill them in so the boss can read them... It is a lot easier doing it now than what I did before because I know I can do it now. (Doug)

In her new role as a supervisor, Lee's own experience as an adult literacy student

has made her aware of potential difficulties for the people she supervises, so she looks for ways to minimise potential problems around text material.

We make quite a lot of different stuff. And you just write out all the instructions on how to do it and what tools to use. I've been doing a lot of that lately. And it's only since being the supervisor that I actually get to do that now. Before, I got told what to do, and I did it. But now I have input on how things should be worded. I try to make things as simple as possible knowing the fact that there might be other people out there who can't understand this hi-tech jargon.

Some of the programme participants still struggle with literacy tasks at work, but greater levels of confidence and assertiveness now make these difficulties less daunting than previously.

I was more open, more telling them, "Oh look, I don't know how to do this or do that, but can you help me?" if I felt

comfortable with the person. If I didn't feel comfortable, I didn't go there. I'd go there and say, "Oh, I want that job — but I can't." And then I'd think to myself, "Oh, I can do it, I can do it." And then I'd start thinking of [tutors] and then I'd go and get the job. Just the skills that they gave me. (Ellie)

But even when literacy tasks are tackled more easily and competently than before, old fears don't disappear completely.

I find still when that key flashes [on a computer] I've got to look away or I'll actually still be sick, it still has that effect on me, lights flashing or anything. The cursor or anything flash, I actually physically feel ill. (Patricia)

Impact at home

Greater confidence and improved literacy skills also have benefits for the participants in their family lives. Lee has become more sociable and been able to open up with her family about her learning difficulties, about which she had previously been secretive.

Before I was a loner. Being with a large group of people and having lunch with them over a period of time, I had to learn to mix with them. I suppose I learnt socialising skills too. I've been able to speak with my family about it more. They've been quite sympathetic about it.

Tony now helps his children with their homework, which he never did before for fear of looking inadequate in their eyes.

Yeah I guess. 'Cause like sometimes when I'm home we'll sit around the table and I'll try and do the homework thing together. Yeah, I do a lot more with the kids.

Because they now have better literacy skills and the confidence to use them in front of others, interviewees have found that they are now able to provide positive role models for the children in their lives.

Like one of my younger nieces, she occasionally asked me to read them bedtime stories and that sort of thing so I don't mind doing that now. (Steve)

When I was made redundant I was frightened of not having a job or something to go to and let my children, you know my children couldn't see me getting up and going to work, I thought now if I laze around they're going to see this and

they're going to think it's the norm and we're going to get back into that trap again so I got up, I went to school and then every now and again when there were holidays or something one of them would come with me for the day. They'd see Dad going to school, they'd see Dad learning. They'd ... we'd do our homework together, so it had a pretty big effect on them. It spills over, it's a pretty big thing. They know that we don't let them have time off because you can't afford to have time off school, you need to learn everything every day. As much as you can. They're doing all right, they're doing really well. (Martin)

Jordan spoke at length about the changes that have occurred in his immediate family as a result of the programme's impact on him.

Now I can sit down and actually read my children stories and 'cause like before, my four year-old daughter - she's just turned four, but she was three and she'd come to me saying, "Dad can you read me this book?" and I'd be like, "Oh well, no I can't 'cause I can't read" you know? And that would make me feel bad within myself 'cause I can't do something for her. Now she comes to me going, "Can you read me this book?" and I'll read it to her. "Can you read me that one?" and I'll read that one for her and before you know it she's asleep. And now that I've got a two year-old son, I look at him and I think well I could give you more than what I had when I was a young lad, 'cause my parents — my father went to jail when I was seven and he passed away when I was fourteen. He passed away in jail so I never really had a father figure to read to me and do things like for me and explain this that and the other. With my son I can show him, "Well this is what you do with this and if you're not sure here's a book, read it — I can help you read it" and when my daughter comes to me with maths problems from school I can go "Well let's sit down and work this out" you know? Same with her reading. I'm helping her read now which makes me feel good because I'm actually seeing her achieve. Which makes me feel more of a — oh I don't know how to put it — more of an achiever.

And within his whānau, he has also found a new role.

My immediate family, like my aunties and uncles have seen me go through a pretty rough time in my life and now that I'm starting to, well not starting to, but now that I'm getting more into my reading and that they can see that I'm more the, a brighter person. I'm not so shy and I can get more

into a conversation with my family now because prior to that they would look at me and go “Oh, it’s just Jordan you know, black sheep of the family.” But now they’re looking at me going “Well that young man’s actually going somewhere in his life” and it makes me feel proud of myself that my family think of me like that. [Before it was] “There goes Jordan, he’s gonna go the same way his Dad did.” With my fiancée you know, we can sit down and we can have a good read and a good laugh now about anything. And that also makes me feel good ‘cause before that you know, she’s be reading a magazine and she’s be laughing at it and said “Oh here, read this.” And I’d be like, “Well I can’t read” you know. Now same thing happens and I can get the bit of paper off her and we can laugh at the same thing which you know boosts the old spark between us, you know?

For Ellie it meant being able to separate from her violent husband and an end to physical beatings by him.

I made it through the course and they wanted me to do an apprenticeship and I didn’t understand what that was. And I went and told my ex-husband and he said, “No, you’re not going back there” and then I got the beatings, and I never went back.

And for Martin, the programme simply changed his and his family’s lives.

It was the best — one of the best things I’ve ever done. It changed my life and it’s changed the kids’ life, the family yeah.

Negative impact

Not all education has a positive impact on learners. Some research has shown that the learning episodes in adults’ lives that generate the greatest impact often involve considerable discomfort, if not pain at the time and it is only with hindsight that learners see the positive benefits they have gained (Merriam, Mott, & Lee, 1996). But learners sometimes see education as a negative experience, even after some time has elapsed. This latter observation was true for some of the interviewees in this study.

A few said that they had lost confidence, even to the point that Mark said that he felt “like a corpse really.” Others felt disappointed that completion of the course had not led to the type

of jobs that they had hoped for. Alan's father said that his son had experienced great difficulty in maintaining paid employment and was being paid for only part of his present job.

He got a job in Christchurch and then we moved to [another city]. He has that job for a couple of years and then we moved up here to [city]. It was over a year before he could get another job. Very difficult. But he now has a job doing 18 hours a week. He has two days a week where he's not paid, but he is occupied.

Ron felt that he had not been realistically advised about the prospects of a job in the industry he wanted to work in. Four years on, he still has not been able to get into this area and now resents the time that he spent on the course.

I think in my perspective it's all very good to boost somebody's morale up and send them out to achieve something, but realistically they have to realise that if you're of a certain age or of a certain criteria that the industry out there only wants a selected type. And I think they need to have an even keel look on the situation, to say to people, "This is what industry is looking and this is where you are, and your chances are either good, bad or whatever."... I passed my course say two, three, four years ago now. That would have made me 36. So yeah, now the time's ticked away it's even harder to get a job in the [field]. I think people need to be told if they are leaving [programme] and they are going to a particular field, what are their realistic chances given their specific circumstances. Because for an adult, two years out of their life is quite a bit of work time.

Similarly, Thomas feels he made real gains in his literacy skills, but they were not sufficient for him to gain entry into an area of work that requires considerably more skills than he has.

At the moment, I'm working part-time for [company] delivering circulars and newspapers. It's a fill-in for exercise more than anything else. It's really not what I believe I should be doing. What I'd like to do is what I cannot do, because I haven't got full qualifications and enough reading skills to actually do it — and that's be a [technical occupation]. That's what I'd love to do. I could sit all day [activity] no trouble at all, but there's a lot of reading and a lot of computer work now done with [occupation] and that's the only thing that lets me down.... I'm going on 48 now and not getting any younger... So in a way, skill-wise,

people would say, “Crikey, you’re getting near 60 — it’s a bit late to be thinking about being a [technical occupation].” So I knew when I went back onto WINZ, they would write me off and put me back on disability pension. Been through that before. They just see me as a guy with a reading problem and a [injury]. They really don’t want to do anything to actually get me out into the workforce other than get me voluntary work.

Overall impact

Like any educational programme, some participants were changed more substantially by the experience than others. And while some were affected mainly in one area such as their work, others talked about all aspects of their lives being changed as a result of the programme.

You realised there was a whole other world out there that you hadn’t seen before ‘cause you hadn’t been able to read. It opens up a lot more things that you hadn’t seen before, especially getting it in an environment that is positive. (Dennis)

Yes, it has made my working life a lot easier. I have forms I have to fill in at work now so if I didn’t go to [programme] and get that little bit more help with it I would have been probably where I was before I went to [programme]. I can read my son books. It helped there. Mainly it was just filling in forms and reading. I can read the newspaper all right now. I am much more confident. Before I was embarrassed because I was so old and I couldn’t read books. I can read them now so that’s increased my confidence a bit. At work with the forms. I couldn’t do forms on my own, but I can now. I have got a lot more enjoyment out of life now that I can read and write properly. (Doug)

I would say I’m supremely confident. I’m going to go bloody somewhere, definitely. I always tend to think my first job should be my stepping-stone. This is my first job. Before [programme] I didn’t have a job. I feel confident that I would like to try something else, make a career out of something, like a schoolteacher. I had a love of knowledge before. Now I want to share that love of knowledge. It’s the love of learning secrets of the universe. ... Before [programme] I like used to know, now I love knowing. It’s like someone has taken the blinders and you appreciate the whole of creation. Before [programme] I was just a moping idiot. I’m an idealistic dreamer. I want the world to be something.

We could be a race of bloody giants if we wanted and quite a compassionate one. (Lance)

Yes, I get out there and I give everything my fullest now where I used to just sit at home, pump all my pills for my asthma and just hide away. Now I get out there, I go to social things and participate as much as I can in everything. Helped me get out there and get a drive, personal drive for myself. It was there but that gave me a good shove for myself, get out there and get motivated and think well the only limits I've got are the limits I'm going to give myself. (Patricia)

Again, the changes have been hard won and need to be constantly nurtured.

I had the 'I hate the world, you hate me' mentality. 'I'm blaming you for where I'm at in my situation.' Even as an adult you've got that bitterness from a childhood and you don't lose it. It doesn't happen overnight. "I went to [programme] and the light went on" and "Oh, a new world." I gotta work on it everyday. I've gotta keep checking it. So I deal better with people sometimes ... It's helped me to relate better in situations and react better, to analyse rather than jump in, to step back and think. (Richard)

Melinda's own development has inspired her to work for others with similar issues.

So now I don't let anything, I wouldn't let that stop me, whatever I wanted to do I would go for it you know. I really have a real passion for study now, I think even once I finish you know, I will always study, I wouldn't mind doing a counselling diploma too you know and go on and do other stuff. I am really active on different committees and working groups for young people. That has given me a real passion to stand out and talk about different things, I think [programme] has given me that. Yeah, I mean I am doing stuff I would never have dream of doing, I mean I am on a group that is writing a report for the United Nations on the rights of a child and our justice system and stuff like that that I never thought that I would dream of doing and have the opportunity to do so yeah...

It has helped me in my work, I mean especially because I have concentrated with young people, I want to work with young people and a lot of the young people I work with especially when I was working with the justice sort of areas

and other areas have such learning difficulties. It has helped me in encouraging them not to give up and that anything is possible for them and it has helped me in being aware of people. I am a lot more aware I think of people than I would be if I didn't sort of struggle with those things myself and it helps me do alternative ways of working with people. I know that I am constantly challenging people that I work with, my colleagues. I think that when they do forms and that sort of stuff for young people to hand over, I said "look why, have you even thought that some people might not be able to do that and what position are we putting them in?" and so I have challenged some systems and stuff and that is what it has given to me in my work, that we need to find alternative ways in doing things and we can't just assume that people can read and spell and do that sort of stuff.

The next generation and literacy – their children

There is research evidence from longitudinal studies that a disproportionately high number of children experiencing literacy difficulties at school come from homes where one or both of their parents also have literacy difficulties (Benseman, 2002). In the present study the interviewees were asked if any of their children had experienced problems or difficulties learning to read or write. Of the 28 interviewees who had children who were school age or older, 11 (39%) reported no literacy difficulties at all with their children.

Oh no, she's doing quite well actually. Like she can do her ABCs — not a problem and she can count up to thirty and then she can count back with her ABCs and she can count down from thirty, so she's very advanced for her age. With her kindy, well the tutor came and asked us if we were able to put her up a class because what they were teaching her wasn't enough so we says "Yeah, not a problem." So she's been moved up a class, so she's now in the four to five year olds when she was three. But she's a very intelligent little girl. (Jordan)

On the other hand, 17 (61%) of those with children of school age or older said that they had at least one child who had experienced difficulties at some point. For example, both of Noel's sons have had problems throughout childhood.

C has a mild reading and writing difficulty, but he got round that by basically teaching himself to learn and spell. We made a deal with him that he'd at least stay until the fifth

form. He had good teachers too, which was good. They actually helped him out. My son S has a spelling and writing difficulty and reading. He's the thirteen year old. I think he gets help through the university through a reading and writing programme through there. He's actually worse than I am.

There are also variations within families. Of Jane's four children, only one had problems learning to read and despite her determination to help him, his problems have also persisted into adulthood.

Only one, all the others are great and that was the one I tried to help, but he was a very hyper[active] child and he had problems learning and 'cause I didn't want him to end up like me and it was like a screaming match all the time. He was always disruptive in class, naughty. But he's got a job, he's bought his own home with his partner, he's doing all right now, but he does have a problem with reading and spelling. But it's like, I couldn't help him because he didn't want to be helped. He couldn't relax enough to watch TV, to read or write.

And some interviewees' children have had difficulties that are still not resolved as adults. Talking about how she copes with her own difficulties, Ellie mentioned that her teenage daughter helps her. Her daughter is also doing a literacy and numeracy course at a youth organisation, although it is not going well.

The work is all right. It's just the teacher. 'Cause they're doing more videos and recreation than work itself. She brings it home to me and I go "Oh, oh" and she says, "I know Mum, you don't know how to do it." "OK, thank you."

Not surprisingly, many of the interviewees said that they had been determined that their own children would not experience what they had as children. Bob reflected,

I've always been quite aware that there is potential for the same characteristic, you know the potential for it to come up for my son, is great. Particularly because he doesn't see me sitting around reading books.

But ensuring that their children don't have difficulties does not always happen readily.

Patricia's determination to help her children learn effectively meant being alert to their difficulties and seeking appropriate help, which ultimately brought about success for her daughter.

Well any children are going to have problems if they've got a parent that has a learning difficulty, so that's why you've got to go out of your way and get your children help 'cause this doesn't wash any more when I hear parents say, "I can't read, that's why my children can't read." That is not good enough. You can go and clean someone's house and say I'll do baby sitting for you or I'll do cleaning if you help my child that I can't. And it works quite well bargaining for people. Some of them were quite serious. I had one daughter that I thought would never learn to read and I did a kind of deal with a teacher. I did cleaning for them, they did extra tutoring for my daughter and then the biggest thing was one day I went in to get her for tea and here she was with her nose in a book and she read that book all night. And I rung her teacher the next day at school and said, "She won't be in today 'cause she spent all night reading a book." That was just the most amazing thing out. 'Cause I've always had books and I've always encouraged my children and did what I could do with them and then you've got to think right, I've got limitations now, I'm unable to help them, I need to get them help.

For Noel, this meant being upfront with the school from the beginning about the potential for problems with his son.

I was really terrified that he was going to have the same problems I had. And I actually said to the school right from the start, "Look I have a reading and writing disability, can we make sure that either one of them, if they get it or have it, can they get the help that's needed to get them through?" And he's getting the help needed.

In addition to being alert to their children's literacy development and seeking help when necessary, some interviewees talked about some strategies they have used —or would like to have used. Ellie for example expressed an interest in being able to learn alongside her children — a suggestion which matches the fundamental idea behind family literacy programmes. She felt that it helps when both parent and child are learning together.

I think they should bring out more programmes for parents and their families, especially for my situation for my daughter and me. That'll help a lot of parents that are in that situation. And so both parents, for parent and daughter and parent and children can understand each other. And on the same wavelength that the parents are already there and the child is there too.

In most cases, the help they have sought for their children has been through schools, which appears more readily available and more skilled than earlier generations.

Bob's son has been struggling with his reading, but he is very pleased with how the school has responded.

He's doing really well at school and I feel that his teachers have been listening to him and working with him and he's making a rapid improvement in his situation, which makes me feel confident that his needs are being met, right here and now. That's really great. ... He's learning to read and write and going on, and will overcome the situation for himself. I can see exactly those characteristics in the way it happened to me. But he's been empowered with this modern learning style and he's overcoming it. It's not a mystery to him. They're covering the bases really well, phonetically and auditory and education has come on a long way since I came through. The kids are going through without the pressure. The teachers used to come to us and say, "Well why can't you do it?" They would put all sorts of pressure of on you to perform. Why? I don't know why. This is just what's happened to me. It wasn't very proactive in trying to help through most of the education system, even though .. it wasn't till after I left school that I got proactive in going to seek professional help, that I made good in-roads in learning to read and write.

Martin's son has been diagnosed as having ADHD. While this has meant considerable problems, Martin has been able to use skills learnt in his programme with his son, plus extensive specialist help at school – all of which has left him with a feeling of optimism for his future.

My son is the thirteen year old, he is ADHD, which is a constant battle just keeping his mind on what's happening, but it's working. Trying some of the techniques that we were given through [programme] and that and they go to so much help [at school] as well in that area, pointed us in the right directions, where to get help from and yeah, no we're getting along.

But not everyone has been satisfied with the modern education system. Mark has no faith in State schools based on his son's experience, so has paid for a private school and additional individual tutoring.

I've actually refused to use the public system. I've actually paid for it out of my own pocket so he has the best. Like I said before, make sure he carries a suitcase and not a shovel. And he's doing really, really well.

Summary and conclusions

Introduction

In this report we have explored the experiences and perspectives of 83 people who participated as Training Opportunities and Youth Training trainees in the adult literacy programmes offered by Hagley Community College and Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology between 1996 and 1999. The main focus of the study was on the impact of these programmes on participants' literacy skills as well as on their everyday lives in their communities and workplaces.

The first three chapters provide a background to the study. In the first chapter we gave a brief overview of the way in which adult literacy programmes have developed over the past thirty years, and the nature and development of the adult literacy programmes offered by Hagley Community College and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT). Chapter 2 summarised the aims of the study and described and discussed methods of data collection and characteristics of the people interviewed. Chapter 3 consisted of a literature review with a primary emphasis on studies concerned with investigating the impact and benefits of adult literacy tuition.

The following five chapters presented the findings of the study. Chapter 4 dealt with participants' formative experiences in their families, at school and in the workplace. Chapter 5 discussed the factors that led people to enrol for the programme and their literacy experiences prior to enrolment. In Chapter 6 we examined their perceptions of their experiences on the programme, and in Chapter 7 our focus was on the impact of the programmes on their literacy skills. Then, in Chapter 8 we looked at the wider impact of the programme. Finally, in this concluding chapter we provide a summary of each of the findings chapters. It is important to note however, that each chapter generated its own themes and not all of them are repeated here.

Summary of findings

Formative years

Many interviewees spoke of formative experiences in their families, which they felt had affected them significantly as learners. For many, these experiences were positive — 61% said that their parents were 'interested' or 'very interested' in their

schooling — and had enabled them to overcome or at least reduce their difficulties. For others, however, negative family experiences had influenced them both emotionally and as learners, and these experiences had played a key role in initiating and compounding their literacy difficulties.

Not surprisingly, schooling was highly influential for many of our participants in learning literacy skills. For most of the interviewees, their experience of compulsory school was a negative — and in many cases a very negative — period of their lives. When asked to rate this experience, 70% rated it ‘negative’ or ‘very negative’, 14% saw it as neutral, and only 17% rated it as a ‘positive’ experience. These opinions about schooling were often founded on extensive and on-going violence from peers and/or teachers.

There were also considerable variations in the school experiences of interviewees. Some moved schools a large number of times. Some recalled their primary schooling as a series of negative experiences with secondary schooling being seen in a more positive light. The reverse was more common however, with people’s recollections of primary school being more positive than those of secondary schooling. Some participants were strongly affected by major accidents or extended periods of illness, while others had to cope with constant shifts from one school to another. For this reason, one woman said that she “never had any real education” in her school years. Problems with streaming, low stream classes and unsympathetic or incompetent teachers were seen by some as contributing to their marginalisation, learning difficulties and overall lack of confidence. Some pointed to the inadequate help provided for people who did not fit within the social norms of schools, while others referred to experiences of being bullied.

For these and other reasons, schooling for some was ‘a living hell’; while for others it provided a wide range of experiences that were simply “better forgotten.” Amid all these experiences however, it is important to note that some recalled teachers who had helped them in a variety of ways and were acknowledged as important influences. Individual teachers can achieve lasting positive impact.

This study has also shown that many of the participants’ children have also experienced literacy difficulties. Because of their own experiences however, participants have been determined that they do not follow in the same footsteps in this regard. Interviewees talked about being vigilant and assertively seeking help for their children at school if they experienced difficulties.

Literacy experiences which led to participation in the programme

The research literature (see for example Benseman, 1996; Boyd et al., 2002; Tobias, 1998) points to the complexity and multiplicity of reasons that lead adults to participate in educational activities in general and literacy programmes in particular. In this respect, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research. What is striking about the findings of this study however, is the relatively small proportion of participants who said that their prime motivations in the programme were job-related. This is striking since participation in the programmes was restricted to people who were unemployed. Also somewhat surprising is the relatively small proportion of participants who identified family-related motivations.

The overwhelming majority of interviewees saw the literacy programme primarily in intrinsic educational and personal development terms. These people emphasised reasons and goals that were neither job- nor family-related. In general they saw the programme as providing an opportunity to 'further their education' (perhaps more accurately, to make up for the schooling that they missed out on) or to promote 'personal development'.

Most interviewees first heard about the literacy programme from a range of 'official' sources. These included WINZ, Workbridge and other Training Opportunities providers. Twenty-one percent heard of it from friends and relatives, and 9% first heard about it from newspaper sources. In spite of this, it appears that the sources of information about the programme were quite limited. No references were made for example to employers or trade unions; nor were there any references to health centres, churches, social clubs or other organisations of civil society.

Participants joined the programme with very different perceptions of their abilities, literacy difficulties and learning needs. Perceptions ranged from those who saw themselves as very poor learners with a wide range of learning difficulties affecting their abilities in every facet of literacy, to those who had a much more positive view of themselves as learners and who saw themselves primarily as needing help only with a specific area of difficulty. Spelling and reading were the most frequently cited main areas of difficulty that led people to enrol in the programme, followed by writing, maths, and speech difficulties. Many identified various combinations of these needs as their initial motivation. A significant number talked about their difficulties in terms of dyslexia or other learning disabilities; in some cases these terms came from professional assessments, in others they were terms the interviewees had adopted themselves.

Participants also differed in how they interpreted and understood their learning difficulties and in the ways in which these difficulties affected their self-image. Some kept their difficulties to themselves, with a strong sense of shame about their difficulties and constant vigilance to ensure not being 'found out'. Others were more forthcoming, seeing literacy difficulties as arising not out of their own inadequacies, but as a consequence of their previous experiences and environment. Some saw themselves as deficient in some way, and even responsible in some way for that deficiency. Others however saw themselves in a broader perspective and rejected the negative stereotype of people with literacy difficulties and wanted to challenge it.

The strategies that participants had adopted to cope with their literacy difficulties before joining the programme varied from person to person and depended to some extent on factors referred to above, as well as on the quality and extent of their social networks.

Some interviewees went to great lengths to hide or disguise their difficulties (such as bandaging a hand to avoid writing) to use as an excuse for not being able to write well enough or avoided situations that would require them to expose them (such as ordering only the few items on menus they could identify). Some interviewees reported that reading difficulties had led them to develop techniques for memorising things, and others said they made extensive use of radio and television to provide the information that they could not readily access through newspapers and other written sources.

Most interviewees however had come to depend on a family member (including their children) or friend to help them in situations in which reading or writing could not be avoided. The extent to which this kind of dependence was seen as negative varied. While some saw it in these terms, others felt that this dependence was but a small element within a wider set of social relations that were characterised by mutual interdependence.

Experiences on the literacy programmes

The length of time participants attended the programme varied widely. Only 20% of all those interviewed attended for less than 6 months; 27% attended for a period of between 6 and 11 months; 25% for a period from 12 to 23 months; and 27% for 2 years or more. Clearly a significant number attended their programme for an extended period of time and received sustained tuition during that period.

The vast majority of interviewees rated their overall experience on the programme very positively, and only one person rated it negatively. Moreover, a very high proportion (95%) of the interviewees provided a positive assessment of their own progress on the course, with nearly half rating it as 'very positive', and only four (5%) of the interviewees saying that they had made little, if any, progress.

Some interviewees had a reasonably clear understanding of what to expect when they enrolled for the programme, while others had few, if any, expectations. Most said that their initial experience of the programme was a positive one, but others said that they had been very anxious or scared at the outset. For some this anxiety was heightened by their fear of 'returning to school' — a place, as we have seen, strongly associated in their minds with personal failure.

Once they had joined the programme, most found that it was "totally different" from anything they had experienced at school and for the great majority it was "very much better" than school. When asked to compare their experience on the literacy course with their experience of school, 88% stated that it was 'better' or 'much better' and only 2% said that it was 'worse'.

Positive comments on the Hagley and CPIT programmes focused mainly on their small class sizes, the one-to-one tuition, the flexibility of the programmes, and the way in which much of the programmes were tailored to meet the requirements of each individual. Several commented on their greater feelings of control over the programme and their individual learning and the sense of community and solidarity they had experienced with other members on the programme. Positive comments about the programme almost always included references to specific tutors working in the programmes.

Not everything on the programmes was always positive however. Some participants found some of their fellow learners a hindrance to their learning because of their disruptive behaviour. Reluctant (predominantly younger) participants who attended the programmes under compulsion were seen as a major source of frustration to participants who had whole-heartedly taken on the programme.

These reluctant learners, often with a long history of failure and frustration, bring considerable 'baggage' with them to these programmes, which may make teaching them a significant challenge. 'Turning on' reluctant learners takes considerable skills on the part of the tutors; furthermore success, even over a

sustained period, is never guaranteed and can involve considerable disruption to more motivated learners in the process. Participants in this study confirmed the importance of balancing 'support vs. challenge' reported in other research on Training Opportunities learners (Benseman, 2002).

Impact of the programme on participants' literacy skills

There is substantial evidence in the findings of this study to suggest that most interviewees believed the programme had considerable positive impact on their literacy skills. The overwhelming majority of interviewees indicated that they had made substantial advances in their literacy skills in each of the areas identified. For example, whereas only 25% rated their reading ability before the course as 'OK', 'good' or 'very good', at the time of the interviews 91% rated their reading ability at these levels.

There were, however, substantial variations in the levels of improvement between each of the literacy areas. By way of comparison with the improvements in reading referred to above, the following are the comparable rates for other literacy aspects.

- before the course only 20% rated their writing ability as 'OK', 'good' or 'very good' vs. 73% at the time of the interviews
- in spelling, only 13% rated their spelling as 'OK', 'good' or 'very good' before the course, vs. 63% at the time of the interviews
- in maths, 46% rated their maths ability as 'OK', 'good' or 'very good' before the course, vs. 84% at the time of the interviews
- in computers, only 6% rated their computer skills as 'OK', 'good' or 'very good' before the course, vs. 65% at the time of the interviews.

In the light of this and other evidence, it is clear that most interviewees felt that they had made substantial gains in their literacy skills as a consequence of their participation in the programme. The story is however more complex and subtle than may be suggested by the above data. Participants varied widely in the ways in which they developed, or failed to develop, the different skills, and the findings of this study have highlighted some of these differences.

It is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about variations in achievement by ethnicity or cultural background or by gender and

age. However, it is probable that there was little, if any, difference in the impact of the programme on Māori learners as compared with their Pākehā counterparts. On the other hand, the chapter reports on some possible differences in the impact of the programmes on younger and older women and men.

Participants' perceptions of the nature of their literacy difficulties varied widely. Some identified their main difficulties as related to one specific aspect such as reading, writing, spelling, maths or speaking. Others identified multiple difficulties. Participants varied between those who felt that the programme had had a considerable positive impact on their specific area/s of difficulty (e.g. reading, writing, spelling, maths, the use of computers, and speaking in groups); those with modest gains in these area/s of difficulty whose confidence had nevertheless increased; and those who had made few if any gains in literacy or self-confidence.

The wider impact of the programme

Educational programmes achieve impacts that go well beyond the specific knowledge and skills taught in the classroom. To look at the wider impact of the programmes on the lives of participants, interviewees were asked a number of questions about the effects of the programmes¹⁹ on everyday life, in their homes, family situations, communities of interest and in their workplaces.

The most frequently mentioned benefit of participation in the programme was undoubtedly improved self-confidence. The vast majority of interviewees stated that they had gained significantly in self-confidence as a result of participating in the programmes. Forty-eight percent of the interviewees claimed that they were 'much more confident' as a result of attending the programme, while another 36% said that they were 'more confident'. Interviewees gave poignant examples of how these feelings of greater self-confidence transferred through into social situations in everyday life as well as within the family and the workplace.

The relationship between gains in self-confidence and gains in literacy skills is clearly complex, but they are strongly inter-related. At least two forms of literacy-related confidence were referred to. Some said that their increased ability to read, spell, write, solve maths problems, or speak in a group (including in English as a second language) had led to increased confidence in these skills, which in turn had led to greater levels of general self-confidence.

19 In most cases, participation in the programmes meant improved literacy skills, but not in all cases.

There were others who claimed that they had made little or no progress in improving these skills. On the other hand, while some of these interviewees said that there had been little if any change in their levels of confidence (with one or two stating that the programme had an adverse effect), others said that their self-confidence had increased nonetheless, as they had discovered that they were not alone with their difficulties and they had developed further strategies and ways of dealing with their difficulties. One of the most common comments from these people was that they said they had gained the confidence to tell people of their difficulties and ask for help.

In other words, improvements in literacy skills almost invariably resulted in greater self-confidence, but improvements in self-confidence (through learning self-assertions skills for example) may occur with little or no change in literacy skills.

In the latter case however, improved levels of self-confidence can still give the participants greater self-awareness and a wider range of skills to manage their literacy difficulties in their daily lives.

Interviewees described some of the ways in which their new skills had been of substantial value to them in obtaining jobs and gaining promotions, and how they were using their improved literacy skills at work. On the other hand, a few interviewees pointed to disappointments when they found it difficult to find the employment they wanted — in spite of their newly acquired skills. Interviewees also talked at length about ways in which they were using their literacy skills in their home lives. Of particular note was their increased awareness of their own children's literacy development, their determination to help them avoid what they themselves had experienced as children and their keen engagement in their children's schoolwork generally.

Conclusion

This study has shown that access to a well-resourced adult literacy programme for a substantial period of learning can significantly improve the literacy skills and self-confidence of many participants. The overwhelming majority of interviewees rated their experiences on these programmes very highly indeed. In particular they appreciated the small class sizes, the use of small groups and the one-to-one tuition provided; they also appreciated the flexibility of the curriculum and the length of the programme as well as the camaraderie, peer-support and the non-competitive environments which allowed them to continue learning at their own pace and in their own way. They appreciated

the fact that they were treated with respect and dignity by skilled tutors and others associated with the programme, and many valued the opportunities provided for access to computers and other facilities.

Many of the participants in this study also valued the ready availability of other educational programmes that could be integrated with the literacy programmes at Hagley and CPIT. The resulting integrated programmes they experienced not only helped extend the nature of the education they experienced, but can also served as a bridge to further educational programmes.

The interviewees joined the programme for a variety of reasons, not always employment-related. Many saw it as providing an opportunity to 'further their education' (perhaps more accurately, to make up for the schooling that they missed out on) or to promote 'personal development'. Participants had heard about the programme from a relatively narrow range of mainly 'official' sources and were drawn from those who were registered as unemployed. In view of the breadth of interests, motivations and goals identified it seems desirable in future to make it possible for programmes such as these to draw on a very much wider constituency; and to advertise more widely using television and radio, as well as formal and informal networks, such as employers, trade unions, churches, social, cultural and sports clubs, and health centres.

We believe that this study makes an important contribution to furthering our understanding of the experiences and perceptions of people who attend full-time adult literacy programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Adult literacy as a recognised form of educational provision has only emerged over the past two decades and is still under-developed and under-researched in comparison with more established areas of education. The field to date has developed largely due to the conviction and dedication of a body of committed practitioners working with scant funding. There are promising signs that this situation is changing with increased government recognition reflected in national policy and funding. Research on the issue has also been limited and largely peripheral to debates on the issue.

We believe that effective programme planning and teaching needs to be based on good quality data and analysis rather than intuition and hearsay and that this study can contribute to that base.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Sample Details

	Total group (N=276)		Sample (n=83)	
Gender				
M	163	59%	44	53%
F	113	41%	39	47%
	<hr/> 276		<hr/> 83	

Age	Total group (N=276)		Sample (n=83)	
<20	1	0%	0	0%
20s	99	36%	25	30%
30s	95	34%	26	31%
40s	61	22%	23	28%
50s	20	7%	9	11%
60s	0	0%	0	0%
	<hr/> 276		<hr/> 83	

Ethnicity	Total	%	Sample	%
Asian	3		1	1%
Pacific	11		2	2%
Pākehā	202		65	78%
Māori	492		13	16%
Other	9		2	2%
	<hr/> 274		<hr/> 83	

Age	Total group (N=276)		Sample (n=83)	
<30	100	36%	25	30%
30-39	95	34%	26	31%
40 and above	81	29%	32	39%

Appendix B – Interview schedules

Interview Schedule for telephone interviews for Christchurch Follow-up study of Adult Literacy Students

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____ Ref Number: _____

Date of interview: _____

Comments on reception/willingness to be interviewed:

(Use your own words and look constantly for appropriate probing/follow up questions)

A -The literacy programme itself

Firstly, I'd like to start by asking you a number of questions about the literacy programme which you attended at Hagley/polytech....

Date and length of participation *[we're basically after how many hours total tuition/patterns of attendance/indicators of success etc]*

1 How long did you attend the programme?

[_____ weeks/months] Don't remember []

2 And, was this full-time or part-time? FT [] PT [] *[Hagley 1998 people only]*

Enrolment/entry to course

3 How did you first hear about the [Hagley/polytech] course?

Skill NZ [] WINZ [] Employer [] Friend [] Relative []
Other Training Opportunity provider [] Self []

Other [and/or additional information]:

4 What made you decide to go to [Hagley/polytech]? *[open question]*

help with present job [] get new job [] 'educational' []
personal development [] family []
Other [and/or additional information]:

5 What were the main difficulties/problems you were having which led you to join the programme? [multiple ticks OK]

Reading [] writing [] spelling []
speaking [] maths []

Other [and/or additional information]:

6 Can you give me some examples of the sorts of difficulties you were having with your [reading/writing]?

[Use open-ended question, but if there is no response it might be useful to start people off by giving one or two examples as suggested below.]

[Here people might refer to such things as finding it difficult to read notices, manuals or written instructions etc at work, or read or understand accounts at home, or pay accounts, or read street signs, or keep in touch by writing or using telephone directories, or look for jobs, or read the newspaper, or read junk mail, etc.]

6 How did you used to cope with these difficulties before going to Hagley/polytech?

[eg Get help? And if so from whom? Avoid the issue? Only apply for limited range of jobs? etc]

7 How do you cope with those sorts of difficulties now?

8 I want to ask you some 'before and after' questions about your literacy skills when you first started at Hagley/Polytech and compare these with now. On a five point scale where 1 is very low and 5 is very high, how would you rate your (reading/writing etc) before Hagley/Polytech now and before?

(Use the scale to fill in the "now and before" brackets below.)

1=not very good at all

2=not very good

3=ok/average

4=good

5=very good

Reading Now ____ Before ____

Has your reading improved because of the course

a lot [], a little [], or no change at all [].

Comments? _____

Writing Now ____ Before ____

Has your writing improved because of the course

a lot [], a little [], or no change at all [].

Comments? _____

Spelling Now ____ Before ____

Has your spelling improved because of the course

a lot [], a little [], or no change at all [].

Comments? _____

Maths Now ____ Before ____

Have your maths skills improved because of the course
a lot [], a little [], or no change at all [].

Comments? _____

Use of a computer Now ____ Before ____

Have your computer skills improved because of the course
a lot [], a little [], or no change at all [].

Comments? _____

[If they are speakers of other languages, ask the next question, otherwise skip to #9]

Speaking Now ____ Before ____

Do you feel that your ability to speak improved because of the course
a lot [], a little [], or no change at all [].

Comments? _____

9 Have you done any other courses or have you had any help with
your [reading/writing, etc] **since** you were at [Hagley/polytech] ?

Yes [] No [] If yes, what course, where and what year?

10 What about **before** you went to [Hagley/polytech] (i.e. after leaving school)?

Yes [] No [] If yes, what course, where and what year?

Nature of the course

11 Looking back, what aspects of the course did you find most helpful?

(eg. 1:1, computers, group, exercises, materials/resources, etc - more than one is OK)

Why?

12 Which aspects were least helpful?

Why?

13 How would you describe your progress overall as a result of attending
Hagley/polytech?

Very good [] good [] OK [] Not v. good [] Not v. good at all []

14 How long do you think it took you on the course before you felt you were really making progress? [___ weeks/months]

15 Why did you leave the course? [*Open Q; interview to code*]

Course finished [] Got job [] Illness/other crisis [] Dissatisfied []

Went to another course [] 'Learnt what I needed' []

Other _____

16 How did your experience at Hagley/CP compare with your experience at school when you were younger?

Much better [] Better [] About the same [] Worse [] Much worse []

In what ways?

17 Are you still in touch with any of the other students from

Hagley/polytech? Yes, quite a few [] A few [] None []

B -Impact of the literacy programme

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about what you've done since you left the literacy programme at (Hagley or Polytech)

Cognitive impact

18 You said that the main reason you went to [Hagley/polytech] was _____, What are the main things you do that involve [reading/writing etc] at present?

19 And how different is this from before you were at [Hagley/polytech]? Very different [] A bit different [] the same []

If different, how is it different?

20 Would you still like help with your [reading, spelling etc.]? Yes [] No []
(If yes, do have any plans to look for help? What are you thinking of doing?)

Impact on employment

I would now like to find out something about your background in employment.

21 What sorts of jobs did you have **before** you went to Hagley/polytech?
(Include PT, homemaker etc; If more than 2, get 2 main ones - Detail needed)

22 And, what sorts of jobs have you had **since** you were at Hagley/polytech?
[Include PT, homemaker etc; If more than 2, get 2 main ones]

23 What is your **present job**?

24 Do you think the [Hagley/poly] course has had an impact on your working life since then? Yes [] No [] Unsure []

If so, in what ways? (*Probe to identify any new job-skills, whether they have learned to do new things at work, whether they feel better about their work, whether they are enjoying their job more, whether they are finding their job more interesting or demanding, whether they have taken any work-related courses, whether they were looking for promotion or a move to a better job elsewhere.*)

Impact on other aspects of life

25 When you think about what has happened to you since you left the [Hagley/polytech] programme, do you think it has affected your self-confidence? Are you -much more confident [], more confident [], about the same [], less confident [], or much less confident []?
Can you give me some examples of this?

26 Do you think it has affected you in any other ways?
Yes [] No [] Unsure []
If yes or uncertain, how might it have influenced you?
[*If necessary probe.*]

For example has it influenced you in relation to your - Family Church what you do in the community clubs/organisations your kids (eg. schooling) Other

27 What was the most important thing that [Hagley/polytech] achieved for you?

28 How would you rate your experience at [Hagley/polytech] overall?
Very positive [] Positive [] Neutral [] Negative [] Very negative []

C -Background and influences

Now I'd like to ask you for some background information as well as some of the influences in your life

Early experiences – school and family

29 How did you feel about your experience of compulsory school?

Very positive [] Positive [] Neutral [] Negative []
Very negative []

30 Were there any specific things in your family or at school that may have affected your (reading/writing etc)?

31 How interested were your parents in what you did at school?
Very interested [] Interested [] Neutral [] Not interested []
Not interested at all []

32 Did you ever get special help with your reading/spelling/writing etc when you were at school?
Yes [] No [] Unsure [] (may include 1:1 work with teacher)

33 How useful was this help?
V. useful [] Useful [] Undecided [] Not useful [] Not useful at all []

34 Did you move school? If so, how many times did you move school?
[_____ times]
[doesn't include change of levels primary, intermediate, high school]
(If many moves, probe to identify reasons and influences.)

35 How old were you when you left school? [_____ years]

36 Why did you leave school?

37 Do you have any qualifications? Yes [] No []
If yes, find out what qualifications they have and when and where they got them - includes Unit Standards.

D -Socio-demographic data

Now just a few final bits of information about you

38 Gender: M ☐ F ☐

39 How do you identify yourself ethnically or culturally? For example do you see yourself as New Zealand Maori, New Zealand European or pākehā, New Zealand Asian, Samoan, etc?

[What we want is to be able to identify in particular the experiences of people from Maori, Pacific, and other cultural backgrounds.]

40 What is your first language (other than English)?

41 How old are you?

<25 ☐ 25-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60+ ☐

42 Do you have any children?

Yes ☐ No ☐

43 What are their ages?

44 Have any of them had any difficulties or problems learning to read or write?

Probs. with all children ☐ Probs. with some ☐ None ☐ Too young ☐

If any of them have had difficulties, would you say that these problems have been 'serious' or 'big' or have they been small or minor?

And, have they obtained help from their school?

E - Conclusion

Thanks for chatting with me about your experiences. It's been very helpful. We have an information sheet about the project and some contact phone numbers if you want to talk to someone about it. Would you like to receive a printed sheet with contact details for the study etc? Yes No (if yes, ask for or confirm address)

Address if given:

If we need more information from you in the future, may we contact you again? Yes ☐ No ☐

Other preferred methods of being contacted? (phone/email)

**Interview Schedule for Telephone interviews for Christchurch Follow-up
study of Adult Literacy Students Three Questions**

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____ Ref Number: _____

Date of interview: _____

Comments on reception/willingness to be interviewed:

Date and time of interview:

(Use your own words and look constantly for appropriate probing/follow up questions)

A -The literacy programme itself

Firstly, I'd like to start by asking you a number of questions about the literacy programme which you attended at Hagley/polytech....

Date and length of participation *[we're basically after how many hours total tuition/patterns of attendance/indicators of success etc]*

1 How long did you attend the programme? [_____
weeks/months]
Don't remember []

5 What were the main difficulties/problems you were having which led you to join the programme? [multiple ticks OK]
Reading [] writing [] spelling [] speaking [] maths []
Other [and/or additional information]:

13 How would you describe your progress overall as a result of attending Hagley/polytech?
Very good [] good [] OK [] Not v. good []
Not v. good at all []

27 What was the most important thing that [Hagley/polytech] achieved for you?

E - Conclusion

Thanks for chatting with me about your experiences. It's been very helpful. We have an information sheet about the project and some contact phone numbers if you want to talk to someone about it. Would you like to receive a printed sheet with contact details for the study etc? Yes No (if yes, ask for or confirm address)
Address if given:

If we need more information from you in the future, may we contact you again? Yes [] No []

Other preferred methods of being contacted? (phone/email)

Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet



School of Education Te Kura Maatauranga The University of Auckland Private Bag 92019 Auckland, New Zealand

Fisher Building 18 Waterloo Quadrant, Auckland Telephone: 64 9 3737599 ext 7161 Facsimile: 64 9 3737445
E-mail: j.benseman@auckland.ac.nz

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear

Thank you very much for your interview.

Your interview was part of a survey of people who have taken courses at Hagley Community College and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. The group doing the survey is from the University of Canterbury and the University of Auckland. They will be writing a report for Skill New Zealand covering the experiences of people before and after they went to a literacy programme. We believe that this survey is important because it will help improve literacy programmes throughout New Zealand.

All of the information you gave in your interview is confidential, and your name will not be used in the report. You may withdraw any information at any time up to 1st December 2002.

I promise to send you a brief summary of the findings of the survey. If you want to know more about the project, please phone any of the contacts given below.

Yours sincerely,

[Signed by interviewer]

Julie Cates, Hagley Learning Centre, Hagley Community College, 510 Hagley Avenue, Christchurch, Tel: 3791916

Jan Hellyer, Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, P.O. Box 540, Christchurch, Tel: 364 9039 ext 8178

Robert Tobias, Centre for Continuing Education, University of Canterbury, PB 4800, Christchurch, Tel: 364 2987 ext 8489

John Benseman, School of Education, University of Auckland, PB 92019, Auckland. Tel 09 373 7599, ext 7161

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:
The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee,
The University of Auckland, Research Office - Office of the Vice Chancellor,
Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel. 373-7999 ext 7830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE
on September 11, 2002 for a period of 3 years, from 11/9/2002
Reference 2002/237